

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
STAFFORD COUNTY, VIRGINIA
MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING
APRIL 15, 2025

CALL TO ORDER – A regular meeting of the Stafford County Board of Supervisors was called to order by Deuntay Diggs, Chairman, at 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, April 15, 2025 in the Board Chambers, George L. Gordon, Jr. Government Center, 1300 Courthouse Road, Stafford VA.

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

Also in attendance were Bill Ashton, County Administrator; Rysheda McClendon, County Attorney; Taylor Dunn, Deputy Clerk; various staff members; and other interested parties.

INVOCATION

Ms. Gary led the invocation.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mr. English led the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.

CHAIR REMARKS

Mr. Diggs said that Transportation staff and the contractor, Ardent Construction, held an international meeting last night for businesses and residents surrounding Telegraph/Route 1/Woodstock Roads. He said that staff was preparing to start the second locally administered project to improve safety in that area, which was part of a larger \$70 million effort to improve roads in the area, including the Courthouse Road project, the Staffordboro sidewalk project, and several widening projects. He said that for more information on the Telegraph Road project, please visit the transportation page on Stafford's website. He said that as other projects began, information would also be posted for them.

Mr. Diggs said that the County appreciated everyone's patience as they worked to improve their roads. He said that he wanted to remind everyone about the joint hiring event with Stafford County Public Schools on Wednesday, April 30, 2025 from 1:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. at the Rowser Building. He said that this was an opportunity for residents to learn how they could make a difference by serving in Stafford.

Mr. Diggs said that the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Stafford County Board of Supervisors and School Board would host a joint town hall on Tuesday, April 29, 2025, from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. at Colonial Forge High School. He said that the event would feature a brief welcome

followed by a public forum focused on infrastructure, transportation, budget and funding, and economic development. He said that attendees would have opportunities to ask questions and provide feedback. He said that this town hall reflected the two boards' continued commitment to strengthening collaboration and engaging the community and shaping Stafford's future.

Mr. Diggs said that April was Child Abuse Prevention Month. He said that Stafford Social Services staff worked 24/7 to ensure the safety and well-being of the County's children. He said that last year, they investigated over 1,300 potential cases of child abuse and neglect. He said that the public was asked to assist in keeping children safe. He said that if they suspected an issue, they could contact the Sheriff's Office, the schools, or Social Services, and they could even report anonymously. He said that this assistance could make the difference between life and death for a child. He said that the County thanked them for helping to keep the children safe.

Mr. Diggs said that April 6-12, 2025, was Virginia's Local Government and Education Week. He said that Stafford County actively promoted local government to its students and educated the public. He said that the next day, they would host students from the high schools for Student Government Day. He said that they offered virtual and in-person field trips to their water and sewer treatment plants for students, a Students on Success program for students with disabilities, and an internship program at Utilities to provide a pathway to employment. He said that they also had a Blues Academy for residents to learn more about local government. He said that they invited the residents to enjoy a video showcasing photos from their efforts to promote local government and education.

Mr. Diggs said that congratulations were in order for Yvonne Simmers and Glenda Caballero from the Treasurer's Office, who had both received their Master's Government Deputy Treasurer Certification from the UVA Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service. He said that this achievement demonstrated their professionalism, dedication, and commitment to excellence in their roles. He said that they were proud to have such talented individuals on their team.

Mr. Diggs said that he would also like to take a moment to wish Vice Chair Allen a belated happy birthday, which was on April 8. He said that they did not have any presentations scheduled for this evening.

PRESENTATIONS

There were none.

ADDITIONS – DELETIONS AND APPROVAL OF THE REGULAR AGENDA

William Ashton, County Administrator, said that there were no additions or deletions to the agenda.

Ms. Allen motioned, seconded by Ms. Gary, to approve the regular agenda as presented.

The Voting Board tally was:

Yea: (7) Allen, Bohmke, Diggs, English, Gary, Vanuch, Yeung

No: (0)

WORK SESSION ITEMS

There were none.

PRESENTATIONS/REPORTS BY DEPARTMENTS

ITEM 1. COUNTY ADMINISTRATION; GENERAL ASSEMBLY UPDATE

Anthony Toigo, Intergovernmental Affairs Manager, said that he yielded the remainder of his time to Lauren Gilbert.

Lauren Gilbert, Advantus Strategies, said that she appreciated the opportunity to be at this meeting in person and also thanked the Board for their flexibility in allowing her to join virtually during the session. She said that she had some updates to share with them from the most recent General Assembly session. She said that their primary legislative agenda items for 2025 included securing state assistance for the loss of revenues due to the Disabled Veterans Real Estate Tax Exemptions, and also focusing on increasing state support for education funding in Stafford.

Ms. Gilbert said that another education-related effort during this session was regarding the 1% tax for localities to hold referendums on to support school construction. She said that they also attempted to make progress on the cost of compete adjustment (COCA) for Stafford County, which receives 25% of the reimbursement compared to the northern counties, which receive 100%. She said that a key factor in their strategy this year was the General Assembly leadership's skepticism towards any ongoing spending or costs in the amended budget, due to projected decreased revenues.

Ms. Gilbert said that this influenced their approach to the General Assembly session, particularly regarding ongoing funding efforts, which would include the education funding and the Disabled Veterans Tax Exemption. She said that they made significant progress in educating top leadership in the General Assembly, including Senator Lucas, Chair of the Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee, and Delegate Torian, Chair of the Appropriations Committee. She said that they also had successful presentations to the Military Caucus.

Ms. Gilbert said that she wanted to thank Mr. Mayausky for presenting information to the group in Richmond. She said that they had very much appreciated the help from Senator Durant and Delegate Milde, who were also on that Caucus. She said that they were able to clarify the increased costs to localities because of this ongoing exemption, specifically to Senator Reeves and Senator Glass, who would be crucial in engaging moving forward.

Ms. Gilbert said that as she had mentioned, education funding was a major focus for Stafford County this year. She said that in the conference budget passed by the House and Senate, Stafford County was set to gain \$5 million in Fiscal Year 2025 and \$12 million in Fiscal Year 2026. She said that these gains largely resulted from the removal of the support staff cap,

changes to the special education add-on, and bonuses for teacher and standards of quality positions.

Ms. Gilbert said that additionally, there was funding for English learner language undercounts that were corrected in this amended budget. She said that following a reconvened session on April 2, the Governor sent back amendments to the budget. She said that the House and Senate largely rejected his amendments, instead passing a budget that held the General Assembly's education priorities but did not include the Governor's education priorities.

Ms. Gilbert said that the most recent budget did include the \$5 million and \$12 million for Stafford County, but its passage from the Governor had yet to occur. She said that education had been a top priority for the Governor, who had touted several initiatives, and his budget also aimed to increase the rainy day fund. She said that the Governor had not signed the amended budget, but this did not necessarily mean the sky was falling for Stafford County.

Ms. Gilbert said that they still had a budget to act under, albeit one that was below the Fiscal Year 2024-2026 budget. She said that these amendments were part of the budget, and they would continue to strategize for 2026, including efforts on the 1% sales tax for school construction and the referendum allowance for local governments. She said that Senator McPike had been a strong advocate for the 1% sales tax, and it was likely that he would continue to push for it in the next Governor's administration, given Governor Youngkin's veto of the measure twice.

Ms. Gilbert said that they would again review the state's support to enhance their efforts in increasing the Disabled Veterans Tax Exemptions. She said that they would engage with key stakeholders, including commissioners of revenue, members of the money committees, gubernatorial candidates, Virginia Municipal League (VML), and Virginia Association of Counties (VACo), to ensure that this was a top priority for them.

Ms. Gilbert said that beginning tomorrow, they would start meeting with Stafford staff to gather ideas on what may be hindering progress related to the state, with the goal of making changes to their legislative agenda and Stafford's legislative priorities for 2026. She said that she anticipated releasing a new draft of their legislative program to the Board in May, with a potential adoption in July. She said that the Governor had until May 2 to act on all pending bills, including the budget bill, and they would closely monitor his actions.

Mr. Diggs asked if the budget included an additional \$5 million in state funding for the schools.

Ms. Gilbert said that in the amended budget passed by the House and Senate in Fiscal Year 25, there would be an additional \$5 million allocated for Stafford schools if the Governor adopted the budget amendments currently on his desk. She said that the total increase would be \$5 million over the current allocated spending.

Mr. Diggs said that it sounded like it had already been accounted for.

Ms. Vanuch asked if there was a general sense among the leadership that the Governor would not veto the amended budget and send it back to the General Assembly.

Ms. Gilbert said that it would be very unusual for a governor to veto a budget. She said that she did not believe it had ever happened, but it was still an option. She said that the Governor possessed expansive spending powers that had been delegated to the Executive Office by the General Assembly over the past couple of decades. She said that as a result, he would still have authority to allocate funds. She said that while it was still a possibility, she would not say it was highly likely that he would veto this budget.

Ms. Vanuch said that that was essentially what they were hearing from their state elected officials, who had also reached out to leadership to gain a better understanding of the situation. She said that this information helped them inform their decisions on their end as well.

Dr. Yeung said that she wanted to thank Ms. Gilbert for the work she had done so far and the guidance she provided them during their trip to Richmond. She asked if the \$5 million was part of the \$12 million, and if that was part of the \$302 million or if it was an amount above that.

Ms. Gilbert said that the \$12 million would be allocated in Fiscal Year 2026. She said that this would exceed the current allocation from the 2024-2026 budget, making it an amendment to that plan. She said that the additional \$12 million would be a result of the House and Senate prioritizing a recommendation from the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) to remove the support staff cap. She said that a significant portion of this \$12 million was attributed to this change.

Dr. Yeung said that regarding the question about their priorities for this legislative year, she believed that COCA and the 1% tax would again be top priorities, as well as efforts to help veterans and address the revenue share they were missing. She said that she appreciated all the work Ms. Gilbert had done and looked forward to working with her again.

Mr. English asked when they would be discussing COCA again and whether they could get 100%.

Ms. Gilbert said that they would need to scrutinize this proposal closely in their next session. She said that so far, it had not been a successful argument with the General Assembly. She said that it was certainly true that Stafford was now closer to Prince William County and Fairfax County in terms of labor index measurements, than when COCA was introduced approximately 20 years ago.

Ms. Gilbert said that the General Assembly tended to be cautious about unintended consequences. She said that if they adjusted the labor index for Stafford, the Assembly must consider the implications this would have for other localities receiving partial COCA funding. She said that the JLARC study recommended in 2023 that COCA be entirely eliminated and replaced with a different labor measurement for education in all localities.

Ms. Gilbert said that given that the General Assembly already viewed COCA as broken, they likely questioned the motivation behind attempting to fix it. She said that however, the message remained crucial in helping General Assembly members understand that Stafford was not a rural

backwoods County, but a vibrant, thriving community with a mix of rural, urban, and suburban areas that required a dynamic approach to education funding to meet the growing needs of the locality.

Mr. English said that Ms. Bohmke effectively stated their situation at their work session, as they were situated between Quantico and Prince William, and it seemed that the state often struggled to determine how to place them. He said that he appreciated her clarification.

Mr. Diggs said that Ms. Bohmke had also mentioned that the Board of Supervisors must join hands with the School Board and go in person to the General Assembly in Richmond to rally for their local causes.

Ms. Gary said that she would like to express her sincere gratitude to Ms. Gilbert for her presence and the efforts she was putting in. She said that she appreciated her work, especially during this time, as it provided reassurance that they had a dedicated advocate in Richmond. She said that she was supportive of the resources the County had invested to ensure that Ms. Gilbert and her colleagues could effectively advocate for their legislative priorities.

Ms. Gary said that she would like to address a point regarding COCA. She said that she was unclear about the status of this initiative, given the JLARC studies' findings, which seemed to indicate it was no longer a priority. She said that she understood that funds were still available, albeit not being utilized as intended. She said that unfortunately, the Governor's decision to reallocate those funds to other areas means they missed an opportunity to implement the JLARC recommendations. She said that she remained hopeful for a brighter future, and she would like to extend her appreciation to Ms. Gilbert and Mr. Toigo for their hard work and commitment to Stafford.

Ms. Bohmke said that she also wanted to thank Ms. Gilbert for all her efforts in Richmond. She said that she and her team had been a steady hand, and the County very much appreciated it. She said that for the benefit of their audience here and those watching online, she would like to mention the JLARC report that was produced, which she believed was released in July of 2023. She said that it was the first time that the state conducted an audit of education funding in the Commonwealth, with those formulas for education funding being established in the 1970s.

Ms. Bohmke said that she would like Ms. Gilbert to address the General Assembly's efforts to address education funding through JLARC. She said that she would appreciate insight into the goals and strategies the General Assembly was pursuing in this area, particularly in identifying and addressing the most pressing issues. She said that she would also appreciate information on any progress made in the last six months to a year in moving the needle on education funding in Virginia's complex system.

Ms. Gilbert said that JLARC was the group tasked with studying things on behalf of the General Assembly. She said that they conducted a study in July 2023, which thoroughly reviewed education funding. She said that the study found that Virginia was significantly out of step with similar states and that they were drastically underfunding education, a concern that localities had

been raising for decades. She said that the JLARC study resulted in 20 recommendations, so the House and Senate formed a joint committee to study and implement these recommendations.

Ms. Gilbert said that the joint committee met every other month during the interim, not during session, although they had yet to set dates for this interim. She said that she and her team closely monitored the committee's progress. She said that one of the committee's primary concerns was avoiding unintended consequences as they implemented changes to the funding formulas, which were extremely complex and involved large algorithms. She said that they aimed to ensure that localities were not disproportionately harmed as new formulas took effect.

Ms. Gilbert said that the recommendations were put in place to address this issue, which was why they were seeing some initial recommendations, such as the support staff cap and the at-risk add-on change, being implemented. She said that these recommendations had been carefully considered, and it had been determined that they could be done without harming localities. She said that she anticipated that they would see more meetings this summer and then more action in the General Assembly next year, directly related to those JLARC recommendations.

Ms. Gilbert said that it was their goal to make changes that minimized harm and avoided hurting localities and people. She said that this approach was also influenced by cautionary tales from other states that had undergone similar audits, because education funding was too important to be risked in that way.

Ms. Allen said that she appreciated all of Ms. Gilbert's hard work. She said that she knew that her contention was with the General Assembly and the Governor. She said that with the COCA funding, she knew they were getting ready to move forward, and Mr. Toigo had already begun working on a new packet for her to work on for the summer, as the process of submitting bills would soon begin. She said that her main concern was with the conversation Ms. Gilbert had with people in the health and education committees and the members of those caucuses, she was wondering why they were continuing to focus on COCA. She said that if anyone read the study, it basically stated that COCA was a waste of time. She said that she did not understand why they were trying to continue to address that metric when, by the time they fixed it, it would be out of balance again.

Ms. Allen said that she did not want them to waste time trying to get to a point where they could implement COCA for localities when they should be shifting their focus. She asked if there had been any movement from the General Assembly to start moving forward with devising a new system, one that would allow them to phase out the old method and begin implementing it in the next year or two, this would enable localities, particularly those in the north, to be among the first to be onboarded in the process as they worked towards full implementation. She said that she was wishing for a lot, but she did not see the logic in planning to continue to expend time and energy lobbying the General Assembly for something they were not prioritizing or even considering.

Ms. Gilbert said that she and her team actually implemented this initiative this year, without initiating legislation from the Stafford delegation on behalf of COCA. She said that they focused on addressing reduced revenues from Disabled Veterans Tax Exemptions and sought assistance

from the state due to Stafford's significant burden. She said that although it was still an important aspect of Stafford's story, it highlighted the growth the County had experienced. She said that using metrics from the 1990s could be misleading when considering Stafford's current growth. She said that this aspect was part of that story, and she believed it was essential to consider every opportunity each year when developing their strategy. She said that this year, it was something they implemented while focusing on other directions, for many of the reasons Ms. Allen had mentioned.

Ms. Allen asked if Ms. Gilbert was aware of the reason why the Governor had been hesitant to allocate funds for education from the surplus. She said that some of this surplus could be used to address the issues outlined in the JLARC study, if the Governor chose to do so. She said that they were currently sitting on a significant surplus, which she would appreciate Ms. Gilbert reiterating for the public in the case that they may not know the exact amount.

Ms. Gilbert said that her recollection was that the surplus this year was approximately \$2 billion. She said that a surplus did not mean that they had unearned revenue, which was often misunderstood. She said that it simply indicated that revenues had exceeded the allocated spending, but there were also areas that had been under-supported. She said that the Governor had consistently pushed an approach that included opportunity scholarships and lab school funding since taking office. She said that these were two key cornerstones of his budget amendments this year, and they had been part of his education package for all four years of his governorship.

Ms. Gilbert said that she believed that this was simply a matter of differing opinions on how to achieve the best outcomes. She said that sometimes, decisions came down to politics and differences of opinion. She said that the General Assembly had clearly expressed its differences of opinion regarding the Governor's approach to supporting education. She said that as a result, the budget had been revised to fully support their General Assembly's approach to education, rather than adopting the Governor's priorities.

Ms. Allen said that she had a question regarding the Veterans Tax Relief. She asked if there had been any interest in taking concrete action. She said that she had heard that some Assemblymen and women had had this issue brought to their attention, but now that it was being discussed by the relevant committees, she was wondering if they would actively pursue steps in the next session to either conduct another study or take tangible steps to make a meaningful impact.

Ms. Gilbert said that it was challenging to determine their immediate actions, given that it was an election year and many were currently focused on re-election efforts, which was evident locally as well. She said that they would be reaching out to members, including those who had expressed interest this year, as well as key stakeholders such as Senator Reeves and Senator Lucas, and members of the Veterans Caucus who had shown concern about the growing challenges facing localities. She said that they would definitely be going back to them.

Ms. Gilbert said that that they were also working on a letter from Chair Diggs to VACo, which was part of the National Association of Counties (NACo) and was researching information about other states that had implemented or adopted similar programs to address the challenges they

were facing. She said that they were engaging with a range of partners, including their legislative partners and legislators, and this would be an integral part of their strategy as they began drafting the legislative program and determining its shape for next year.

Dr. Yeung said that she wanted to build upon Ms. Allen's statement regarding COCA. She said that as someone who had been working closely with the School Board for the past four years, and serving on the School Board before then, bringing this issue to their attention alongside her colleagues, Ms. Vanuch and Ms. Bohmke, and others, it had shed light on the complexities of the problem. She said that it was not sufficient to address COCA in isolation; they must also consider the impact on veterans, revenue loss, and other initiatives they were working on together.

Dr. Yeung said that the realization was that Stafford was experiencing revenue loss, particularly in the context of their schools, and that this had a significant impact on the County. She said that therefore, it was essential that they combine these efforts and continue to fight for a comprehensive solution, even if they decided to explore alternative approaches to finding revenue. She said that by keeping all aspects together, they had been able to make progress, and she appreciated the support provided in this effort.

ITEM 2. COUNTY ADMINISTRATION; APPOINT MR. BRIAN OGLE AS THE CITIZEN REPRESENTATIVE ON THE FAMPO/BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR THE UNEXPIRED PORTION OF THE TERM ENDING DECEMBER 31, 2026

Donna Krauss, Deputy County Administrator, said that she apologized for the error. She said that they had received notification from the committee that one of their members was unable to serve any longer, and they had requested the appointment of the alternate, which was this individual, to take the seat and continue to function. She said that the resolution was missing, so staff would work on that and would bring it back to the Board in a subsequent meeting.

Ms. Vanuch said that it could be put on the consent agenda for the next meeting.

Dr. Yeung asked if her colleagues would be supportive of masking the IP addresses of individuals who filled out the Boards, Authorities, Commissions, and Committees (BACC) application form. She said that it was currently made visible to the public, which she felt was unnecessary.

Ms. Gary said that she did not have an issue with masking the IP address. She said that however, she thought that their normal process was to consider BACC appointments in closed session. She asked if they could follow that normal process rather than putting it on the consent agenda. She asked if this was an urgent item.

Ms. Vanuch said that if they anticipated controversy, a Board member might request it be moved to closed session. She said that it may be listed under new business or, under the new format, it would be discussed during the work session. She said that as long as the Board did not object, it

could be approved by consent. She said that if a Board member objected to the appointment, it would not qualify for consent.

Mr. Diggs said that there was Board consensus to mask the IP addresses of BACC applicants.

Ms. Vanuch said that to she could provide some context for why the IP address was made public. She said that they previously had a board member who would make online board comments on the portal during the COVID-19 pandemic using made-up names. She said that once that was realized, they removed that board member and made the IP addresses public.

PRESENTATIONS/REPORTS BY DEPARTMENTS

ITEM 3. BUDGET AND MANAGEMENT; THIRD-QUARTER FINANCIAL REPORT

Andrea Light, Chief Financial Officer, said that she would provide a quick review of the third quarter financials to the Board. She said that they would examine economic indicators, General Fund revenues and expenditures, and other funds. She said that she would first discuss changes in home sales and home values. She said that changes in home sales could be lagging indicators of the overall economy. She said that they were seeing a 10% year-over-year change in Stafford County, and home values were increasing at 3% year-over-year. She said that they were also monitoring unemployment rates, which currently stood at 3.2%, according to February data.

Ms. Light said that this was still lower than the 3.9% rate they reported last fall. She said that their FY2025 All Funds Revenue stood at \$1.08 billion and \$38.6 million of that was federal revenues, accounting for approximately 4% of their total revenue. She said that a breakdown of how these federal funds were allocated was shown on the right-hand side of the provided graph. She said that primarily, these funds supported school grants, school nutrition, and Social Services. She said that a small portion was allocated to Transportation and asset forfeiture. She said that their General Fund revenue was anticipated to be around 5%, which was determined by the tax rate set by the Board.

Ms. Light said that this would impact their June collections in Fiscal Year 25. She said that the increases in unfunded tax relief were expected to contribute to a revenue shortfall. She said that if the Board set a tax rate of approximately \$0.8936, they could expect a \$9 million reduction in revenue this year, \$5 million if the rate was increased by \$0.03, and \$2.3 million if the rate was increased by \$0.05. She said that they still anticipated having revenues exceed expenditures, regardless of the tax rate set. She said that their General Fund expenditures and department spending were aligning with the budget.

Ms. Light said that they were seeing continued vacancy savings, with the Board holding \$2 million of the 5% appropriation in January to add to these savings, and they were projecting an additional \$400,000. She said that they were monitoring the Juvenile Center, where their usage was running 4% above budget. She said that they were also keeping a close eye on their Health Insurance Fund, as their overall expenditures were increasing above budget. She said that in some Other Funds, Fire Levy revenues were projected to be slightly above budget, and they had

seen debt service savings for their apparatus; they did master leases for those and it was slow to have those built across the nation.

Ms. Light said that for Transportation, they had only six months of fuels tax recorded, but it was exceeding prior year and budget projections. She said that in Utilities, operating revenues were slightly over budget, but expenditures were aligning with budget. She said that overall, they were looking to see positive results of operations for the General Fund. She said that the General Fund departments were doing a good job of aligning their budgets with their spending, and they were hopeful to see positive results in other funds.

Ms. Bohmke asked if, excluding the enterprise funds, such as the landfill, Utilities, fees and permits, which tended to pay for themselves, what remained of their general government revenues?

Ms. Light said that their General Fund budget was approximately \$450,000. She said that this budget included charges for services, fees, and fines, as well as the use of property. She said that these items collectively totaled around \$30 million in revenue. She said that consequently, property tax accounted for approximately 70% of their overall General Fund revenues.

Ms. Allen said that she had a question on the motor fuel tax. She asked if they had any data regarding if the increase so far was due to the return to work.

Ms. Light said that they typically did not receive that data from the state, as it was sent to Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission (PRTC) instead. She said that they could request some of that information. She said that one of the main reasons for the changes along Courthouse Road was the construction of the new Wawa at Route 1. She said that there had been a couple of new Royal Farms locations in the area within the past year.

Dr. Yeung said that she wanted to reiterate a point she made earlier in their work session. She said that in terms of the finances and the significant unemployment base they may have in the future, she wanted to inquire about whether they were considering this factor and if they had a plan in place. She said that she was not trying to raise concerns, she simply wanted to ensure that they were thinking ahead on this issue, so that if individuals were impacted by job loss or financial instability, it may affect their ability to make payments.

Mr. Ashton said that they were currently receiving cursory data, but they would appreciate more guidance to enable them to provide more substantial assistance in understanding the potential implications and their impact on them. He said that they would like to know when these developments were expected to occur. He said that before they could begin planning, it was essential that they had a clear understanding of what they were planning for. He said that although they had received some cursory data, it still required further elaboration in order for them to take any further steps.

Dr. Yeung said that she just wanted to ensure that they were closely monitoring the situation and developing contingency plans.

PRESENTATIONS/REPORTS BY DEPARTMENTS

ITEM 4. BUDGET AND MANAGEMENT; CONSIDER BUDGETING AND APPROPRIATING FY2024 YEAR END FUNDS TO SUPPORT PUBLIC SAFETY RELATED ONE-TIME EXPENDITURES; PROPOSED RESOLUTION R25-102

Andrea Light, Chief Financial Officer, said that there were several public safety items that the Board was being asked to fund with one-time money, utilizing savings from Fiscal Year 2024. She said that these did not impact the Fiscal Year 2026 budget, but they were important. She said that the Board was being requested to consider budgeting and appropriating these funds today. She said that one such item was for Sheriff vehicles, as there was ongoing funding for these, but they typically returned to the Board each year to request additional funding for one-time replacements.

Ms. Light said that the Board was also being asked to fund rifle-rated ballistic shields, with Major Dembowski available to answer any questions. She said that they were also requesting funding for a UPS system, which would provide an uninterruptible power supply for the 911 Center, a critical system. She said that Major Dembowski and Mr. Ramey from Facilities were present to address any specific questions regarding these needs.

Dr. Yeung asked if it was correct that using these one-time funds would not affect their FY26 budget.

Ms. Light said that that was correct because this was one-time funding, which meant they would use it for one-time expenditures.

Ms. Allen asked if Major Dembowski could discuss the shields.

Major Jason Dembowski, Stafford County Sheriff's Office, said that due to the rise in active shooter incidents, they had seen a significant increase in the preference for assault rifles like AR-15s and AK-47s. He said that these shields were rated by the National Institute of Justice for stopping rifle rounds, and they had distinct ballistic properties compared to vests and other protective gear. He said that as a result, they had developed portable, rifle-rated shields that were designed to be carried by their deputies.

Major Dembowski said that these shields were specifically rated for rifles, and they provided their officers with the necessary protection in the event of an incident involving a barricaded subject armed with a rifle. He said that they could deploy these shields strategically throughout their department to ensure their deputies had the proper coverage needed for these types of incidents.

Ms. Allen motioned, seconded by Ms. Vanuch, to approve Proposed resolution R25-102.

The Voting Board tally was:

Yea: (7) Allen, Bohmke, Diggs, English, Gary, Vanuch, Yeung

No: (0)

ITEM 5. CAPITAL PROJECTS TRANSPORTATION; CONSIDER AUTHORIZING A PUBLIC HEARING TO CONSIDER AMENDING AND REORDAINING STAFFORD COUNTY CODE, CHAPTER 13.5, EXHIBIT B, "ROAD IMPACT FEE SCHEDULE," TO REDUCE IMPACT FEE RATES; PROPOSED RESOLUTION R25-109

Bryon Counsell, Chief Director of Infrastructure, said that this item was for the Board to consider setting a public hearing to hear public comment regarding modifications to the ordinance adopted last fall, which was set to begin on July 1, 2025. He said that this presentation would cover a brief history, some key decisions, and a summary at the end. He said that in 2003, the Board adopted the allowable tool in state code that allowed for transportation impact fees. He said that since then, these fees had generated approximately \$9.1 million in 10 years to offset approximately \$600 million in local projects.

Mr. Counsell said that as required by state code, the fees must be reviewed every two years. He said that last year, a study was performed, and analysis concluded that the fee required to offset the projects would need a significant increase. He said that at that time, the Board had elected to set the fee at 50% of the highest rates. He said that staff had been asked to present an ordinance to reduce the fees to 10% of the maximum fee while additional analysis was conducted on the amount. He said that if the Board set the public hearing tonight, actions that would still lie before them would be to set the public hearing and schedule it for May 20, and then to consider modifying the fee and/or the date of its implementation.

Ms. Vanuch asked if the Board would be amenable to increasing the advertised rate to 30% instead of 10%, then hear from the public before deciding if 10% was the right amount. She said that once they advertised it, they could not increase it beyond that advertised rate, so it would be best to advertise it at 30% and set it lower as necessary.

Ms. Gary said that she had not supported the original proposal because she believed they needed more time to consider the committee's thoughts and additional feedback. She said that the committee, required by the state, had provided some further insights, but they had not given them sufficient time or space to fully develop their ideas. She said that as a result, she had not initially supported the proposal.

Ms. Gary said that she believed the proposed percentage was set too high, which was why they were reconsidering it. She said that their goal was to determine what worked best for their business community. She said that to be clear, this motion was not intended to eliminate the proposal entirely, nor to leave it at 10%. She said that the point of this was to take this action based on recommendations from their committee.

Ms. Gary motioned, seconded by Dr. Yeung, to approve Proposed Resolution R25-109.

Ms. Vanuch motioned, seconded by Mr. English, to approve Proposed Resolution R25-109, with an advertised rate of 30% instead of 10%.

Ms. Vanuch said that to reiterate, she believed they could advertise it at a high level and then, after hearing public comment, set the cap at 10%. She said that she thought it would be prudent to err on the side of caution and set the cap at 30% to allow for public comment. She said that by doing so, they could ensure that the public had an opportunity to provide input, rather than simply setting the cap at 10% without their participation. She said that when they did advertise it, they could then vote as they saw fit, so it would provide them with the flexibility to advertise accordingly.

Dr. Yeung said that one of the reasons they reconvened in closed session to address this issue was because it seemed that they had not fully considered the perspectives of everyone within the staff. She said that Ms. Vanuch had made a point that she understood, but at this stage, they were not trying to set a precedent or leave it as is. She said that they were attempting to give the staff the time they needed to conduct their study, which had been conducted recently.

Mr. Counsell said that the last study was conducted in 2024, whereas the previous one was conducted between 2012 and 2013.

Dr. Yeung said that not everyone had the opportunity to discuss the 2024 study, and that was a concern.

Ms. Bohmke said that she was supportive of the substitute motion, because as Ms. Vanuch said, it gave them flexibility to decide on the best rate. She said that it would not hurt to start higher and go down from there.

Ms. Allen said that in full transparency, she initially wanted zero, following a thorough discussion amongst themselves that her colleagues were referencing. She said that she was not convinced that setting it at 30% mattered, as she did not believe there was sufficient support for it within the Board, based on their extensive conversation, which included herself. She said that there were nuances to consider, and she believed that once their staff had the opportunity to review and implement the detailed directions they had provided, they would be able to better understand the situation.

Ms. Allen said that the public had not yet been fully informed, but they had provided them with extensive information, such as conducting a study to determine if they could categorize and establish different metrics for various areas within the County. She said that this was not a one-size-fits-all approach, and she was concerned that rushing to meet a deadline would lead to further discussion at a future Board meeting. She said that given this, she had decided to support the 10%, rather than the 30%. She said that she understood Ms. Vanuch's perspective, but she did not want to have another long discussion about it at this moment.

Mr. Diggs said that he did not feel it was appropriate to allow social media discussions to allow the Board to dictate how they governed, especially considering the Board and staff had already discussed this prior to today. He said that however, he understood that the Board could choose to adopt a lower rate, so he would support the substitute motion.

Ms. Gary said that she would like to remind everyone that they had a thorough and extensive discussion about this topic, which involved input from their legal team. She said that the 10% figure was reached after careful consideration, and she understood that some people may have concerns about the optics. She said that it was their responsibility to explain the reasoning behind this decision, and they had in-depth discussions about what this would entail.

Ms. Gary said that it had been consistently clear across all statements from this Board that they did not intend to eliminate or leave it at 10%. She said that instead, they were trying to find a solution that would give them time to gather more information and avoid negatively impacting the business community, which was a key consideration at the time. She said that she was concerned that by moving forward with the substitute motion, they may be undoing the 10% figure that they had previously decided upon in their closed session, which she believed was an appropriate compromise given the circumstances. She said that she would like to refresh everyone's understanding of this decision.

Mr. Diggs called the vote on the substitute motion to adopt Proposed resolution R25-109 with an advertised rate of 30% instead of 10%.

The Voting Board tally was:

Yea: (4) Bohmke, Diggs, English, Vanuch

No: (3) Allen, Gary, Yeung

ITEM 6. PARKS, RECREATION, AND TOURISM; CONSIDER AUTHORIZING THE COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR TO ADVERTISE A PUBLIC HEARING TO CONSIDER A LEASE AMENDMENT WITH THE PATAWOMECK INDIAN TRIBE OF VIRGINIA FOR 6.5 ACRES OF COUNTY-OWNED PROPERTY NEAR AQUIA LANDING PARK ON TAX MAP PARCEL NO. 41-6

Eugene Lowe, Director of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism, said that the Board was requested to authorize a public hearing regarding the proposed amendment to the lease agreement between Stafford County and the Patowomeck Indian Tribe of Virginia. He said that on March 17, 2015, the Board had entered a 10-year lease agreement with the tribe for a portion of Aquia Landing Park. He said that this area included a monument referred to as the Medicine Wheel and a reburial ground for Native American remains removed from other parts of Stafford County.

Mr. Lowe said that to protect and promote the site, the tribe had implemented a capital improvement plan to safeguard the site, which included the construction of a driveway and partial parking area to improve access, the creation of trails linking visitors to the monument, the installation of tables, benches, and waste receptacles, preservation efforts for the Civil War Battery Site located within the area, and quarterly maintenance to ensure ongoing care and accessibility. He said that since the original lease agreement had expired, the tribe sought to amend the agreement, requesting a new initial term of 10 years with the option to renew for two additional five-year periods. He said that as part of the amended lease, the tribe was committed to maintaining public access to the monument and reburial grounds.

Dr. Yeung asked if any representatives of the tribe were present.

Mr. Lowe said that no, this was a public hearing notice.

Dr. Yeung said that she had not had sufficient time to review everything due to her focus on the budget, but she recently obtained additional information from a colleague. She said that based on this new information, she believed it was essential that they consider taking this matter into closed session.

Mr. Diggs asked if the information was only shared with Dr. Yeung and not with the rest of the Board.

Dr. Yeung said that she had obtained that information because the County Attorney had mentioned it. She said that she simply wanted to bring it to their attention.

Mr. Diggs said that he apologized, but that information was inaccurate.

Dr. Yeung said that she was unclear as to why staff had forwarded that information.

Mr. Diggs said that he did not think they needed a closed session. He said that the purpose of this item was for staff to provide an overview of the project and for them to advertise the public hearing, which was scheduled to take place in May, if he understood correctly. He said that they had time between now and then to conduct any necessary research and ask any questions they needed to, before moving forward with the public hearing.

Ms. Bohmke said that she believed they had cleared up that information after their work session, so she apologized that the clarification did not reach Dr. Yeung.

Mr. Diggs said that it was his fault for not communicating that.

Ms. Allen motioned, seconded by Mr. English, to approve Proposed Resolution R25-65.

The Voting Board tally was:

Yea: (6) Allen, Bohmke, Diggs, English, Gary, Vanuch

No: (0)

Abstain: (1) Yeung

RECESS

The Board recessed at 6:07 p.m. and reconvened at 6:30 p.m.

PRESENTATIONS BY THE PUBLIC

1. Caitlin Goodale-Porter, Garrisonville District, said that she had been here several times before discussing the Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program. She said that today, she would like to inform the people of Stafford that those who used this state program often had the ability to utilize the federal counterpart, known as

Chapter 35 Dependents Educational Assistance (DEA) Program. She said that of the over 1,000 people in Stafford County who were utilizing the Virginia program, the majority of those individuals were also eligible for the federal counterpart.

Ms. Goodale-Porter said that among those eligible, some children or 17- and 18-year-olds had both parents who served in military uniform, and according to federal law, they should be receiving benefits through both parents. She said that however, the federal Veterans Affairs had been advising teenagers and non-attorney parents that this would be considered double-dipping. She said that this was not the case.

Ms. Goodale-Porter said that the prohibition against duplication in the U.S. Code was actually against receiving both Dependency and Indemnity Compensation and Chapter 35 at the same time. She said that as a result, many people in Stafford County were being misinformed by the federal VA and were not applying for their full benefits, missing out on the benefits they were entitled to, and not even knowing to appeal and apply again. She said that moving forward, the next slide would display some numbers.

Ms. Goodale-Porter said that this situation was essentially stealing from a family where there had been double service. She said that one plus one should equal two. She said that unfortunately, the VA had somehow managed to make it appear as though the answer was 0.29. She said that one would notice that the veteran was still being required to repay money to the federal government, but that was incorrect. She said that when they applied the policy to pure cases where both parents had a 100% rating, they decided to implement it for everyone. She said that this was where the situation deteriorated around 2010.

Ms. Goodale-Porter said that they needed to stand up to the federal government. She said that some VA employees likely did not require their jobs in Washington, D.C., as they were involved in orchestrating this. She said that the VA had turned veterans into a slush fund, and their children were shouldering the majority of the burden. She said the judges who had decided the outcome of the *Osman v. Peake* court case determined the VA was required to provide two full sets, or 72 total months, of Chapter 35 in all such future cases.

2. Sandy Dowden, Garrisonville District, said that she had concerns regarding the arrival of Buc-ee's to their County, which she categorized into three areas: traffic, safety, and budget. She said that traffic was a major concern, as it would significantly increase during rush hours, particularly when apps adjusted traffic patterns to Route 610, Mine Road, Winding Creek, and Shelton Shop. She said that this coincided with the time their students traveled to and from school, affecting Colonial Forge and North Stafford High Schools, as well as multiple elementary and middle schools.

Ms. Dowden said that the additional traffic on Route 1 would also impact Stafford Hospital. She said that she liked to highlight that this Buc-ee's would be the only one located at a hospital exit, which raised concerns about the potential impact on emergency response times and the hospital's rating. She said that the traffic coming from the south

was not addressed. She said that although Buc-ee's did not service semi-trucks, deliveries did occur, and the 24/7 operation would undoubtedly burden the County.

Ms. Dowden said that she had noted that some residents anticipated additional income from the state, but she believed Stafford County was already considered one of the wealthier counties in the state. She said that consequently, the revenue may not benefit their County as much as expected. She said that with the anticipated increase in population and traffic, she wanted to know that they had the necessary resources to maintain public safety and budget accordingly. She said that she wanted to emphasize that Buc-ee's was a tourist destination, and she firmly believed that the negatives far outweighed any potential benefits, ultimately serving their County poorly.

3. Jenice Perkins said that she used to work for Prince William County Public Schools, supporting children with all disabilities. She said that it was a job she truly loved, but life took an unexpected turn when she was injured in a serious car accident, which left her paralyzed. She said that that experience changed everything for her, but it also revealed her true calling. She said that while she was in therapy, she found herself encouraging others. She said that she reminded them that even though their lives had changed, they still had so much to offer.

Ms. Perkins said that they were not limited; they were just learning to live in a new way. She said that that passion for helping others led her to work independently for the Disability Resource Center. She said that she knew she had found where she was meant to be. She said that she now served as a Community Integration Specialist at the DRC, their local center for independent living. She said that the DRC's mission is to promote independence, equality, and inclusivity for people with disabilities, serving Fredericksburg, Stafford, Culpeper, King George, and Spotsylvania.

Ms. Perkins said that the DRC provided five core skills, independent living skills, peer mentoring, advocacy, information referral, and transitioning services for youth and individuals in nursing homes. She said that the DRC also offered programs like equipment connections, providing items such as wheelchairs, shower chairs, hospital beds, and other essential items, whether the need is short-term or permanent. She said that the DRC offered a home modification grant for those who qualify, and all of its services were free.

Ms. Perkins said that the DRC hosted support groups, including an empowerment group that met every Wednesday, a youth group which she facilitated, and the SOUL group, which met every other Wednesday. She said that on May 28, the DRC was hosting a training about working while receiving Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Income, a crucial topic for many in the community. She said that she was currently working with a consumer in Stafford whom she was helping apply for hearing aids through the DRC. She said that moments like that reminded her of why working for the DRC matters.

Ms. Perkins said that she was proud to work for the Disability Resource Center, and she loved what she did. She said that every day, she assisted individuals in becoming stronger advocates for themselves, and if she did not have the answer, she would help them find it. She said that she appreciated the opportunity to share the DRC's mission and the positive impact it had had.

4. Giles Scott, representative of the Bay Consortium Workforce Development Board, said that he would like to introduce himself and explain the services they provided. He said that their organization served a large area, including Fredericksburg, Stafford County, the Northern Neck, Middle Peninsula, and the Eastern Shore. He said that their service provider in this region was Rappahannock Goodwill Industries, serving Fredericksburg, Caroline, King George, Spotsylvania, and Stafford Counties. He said that in Stafford County, they had invested \$45,000 in training dollars, which had benefited 33 residents who had received training, and served 40 adults in the County.

Mr. Scott said that they had also allocated \$7,700 for youth services, which had enabled 7 residents to receive training and 21 youth to participate in their programs. He said that their main training programs included obtaining a commercial driver's license, adult education to earn a GED, healthcare, and manufacturing. He said that one of their staple programs was the career exploration program, which utilized virtual reality (VR) technology.

Mr. Scott said that this program allowed students and young adults to experience career exploration in a more immersive and cost-effective environment. He said that since its inception, they had provided over 1,000 experiences for youth and young adults in this County, with a focus on healthcare, construction, and manufacturing. He said that they also participated in various activities, such as mock interviews, career exploration activities, and job postings on their website, social media, and email marketing platforms.

Mr. Scott said that these efforts aimed to support the County's workforce development goals and provide residents with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in their chosen careers. He said that they appreciated the support they had received from serving on the Chamber Board, Workforce Now, the Rappahannock Work and Learn Collaborative, and other Career and Technical Education advisory committees throughout the counties. He said that they would like to express their gratitude for the support the County had given in the past and looked forward to future opportunities to provide their services.

5. Abram Marsh, Hartwood District, said that he had a comment regarding leadership. He said that he was a military veteran, a federal employee, and more importantly, the parent of two children, as well as a husband of a school counselor. He said that he was present at the meeting because the Supervisors, as the leaders of the County, had been entrusted by the residents to represent them and provide them with the opportunities they had given them through their funding and other means. He said that the work the leaders did on behalf of the residents and the weight they carried was immense.

6. Mr. Marsh said that acknowledging the weight that this had, he wanted to reiterate a previous comment he had made, which was that officers eat last. He said that leaders lead from the front. He said that each of the leaders, from their managerial districts, was leading from the front. He said that they had all demonstrated this through their actions since their election. He said that many of the residents watched them on television, saw them in their communities, and interacted with them at community events. He said that every single one of the leaders, he had seen outside of this boardroom throughout the entire County, and he applauded them for that.
7. Mr. Marsh said that he wanted to thank each and every one of the leaders for what they did for the residents, because none of the residents were running for their positions, most of the residents did not want anything to do with their positions, but they respected the leaders for what they did in their positions because each of the leaders was a leader who led from the front. He said that he wanted to express the appreciation of the residents to the leaders.

Mr. Marsh said that the residents appreciated the leaders. He said that he wanted to express his personal gratitude to the leaders for everything they had done, would do, and would continue to do for the Stafford community. He said that the residents could not achieve their goals without the efforts of their leaders.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

ITEM 7. BUDGET AND MANAGEMENT; PUBLIC HEARING ON CALENDAR YEAR 2025 TAX RATES; PROPOSED RESOLUTION R25-31

Andrea Light, Chief Financial Officer, said that the Board was holding a public hearing this evening on the proposed tax rates for Calendar Year 2025, as listed in the County Administrator's budget and as advertised. She said that if the Board wishes to increase the rates, they would need to re-advertise and hold another public hearing.

Ms. Light said that the provided list showed that real estate taxes were proposed to increase by \$0.05, while all other taxes remained the same as they were in Calendar Year 2024. She said that the Capital Improvement Program public hearing was also taking place that evening. She said that they would ask the Board to vote on Proposed Resolution R25-30.

Ms. Light said that their Capital Improvement Program was a \$1.4 billion list of projects, primarily focused on schools, Transportation, the courthouse, Fire and Rescue, and Utilities. She said that the Utilities projects had \$759 million worth of projects planned over the next 10 years. She said that the Board would also hold a public hearing that evening on the Virginia Public School Authority (VPSA), which helped them issue bonds for borrowing money to pay off school debt. She said that this was on Proposed Resolution R25-32. She said that the public hearing did not bind the Board to issuing debt. She said that currently, they anticipated issuing up to \$180 million in debt in Fiscal Year 26, with debt service impact increases in FY27 and FY28.

Ms. Bohmke said that they had undergone several work sessions and iterations of this information. She asked if Ms. Light had a finalized CIP document the Board could reference, based on these updates.

Ms. Light said that there was some discussion with the Board regarding a couple of projects. She said that they had not yet updated the numbers. She said that recently, they received the figures for the Stafford High School press box, which was a change from the original estimate of \$2 million in FY27 to a revised estimate of \$3.5 million in FY26. She said that they had conversations about relocating the Stafford High School press box and concession stands at a lower rate, but she did not receive clear direction to make this change. She said that she estimated the cost to be around \$3 million.

Ms. Bohmke said that according to what she had gathered from their last work session, the \$756,000 in proffer funds from Leland and Southgate could be allocated to that project, but it would not be effective this year unless they also utilized the \$1,575,000 from the Pratt Park parking lot. She said that to achieve this, they would need to blend the proffer funds with the offer dollars without drawing any funds from the General Fund for that project. She asked if this was correct.

Ms. Light said that that was correct.

Ms. Bohmke said that she would like to ask the Board if they would be willing to consider this approach. She said that they had previously discussed this, but she believed they had not reached a resolution. She said that there seemed to be a willingness to explore this option, but they needed to provide clear direction if they were to move forward in this manner.

Mr. Diggs said that he supported that decision. He said that he believed they had near-unanimous support. He said that they would be utilizing proffers and parking lot funds to complete the project.

Ms. Light said that staff would make sure those were changed in the resolutions brought forward for the budget. She said that she would annotate that direction in the CIP, to be adopted later this evening.

Ms. Gary said that she had a quick question regarding the potential impact of a bill that would have allowed the 1% sales tax. She said that she would like to know what the estimated revenue would have been if that bill had been passed in the past.

Ms. Light said that she estimated that the annual revenue would be approximately \$25 million.

Ms. Gary said that according to the school's CIP expenses accounted for 52% of that total, equating to \$1.4 million, approximately \$728,000.

Ms. Light said that that was correct.

Dr. Yeung said that she thought she would not discuss Embrey Mill today, but she would. She said that Embrey Mill was not a partisan issue for her, as it was located in Garrisonville. She said that for those familiar with the reason it was important, it was because when some individuals decided to relocate students from a particular school to another, often citing a single reason, and then changed their minds after the fact, it was disingenuous.

Dr. Yeung said that when they looked at the school now and saw the changes, it was clear that relocating students could cause dramatic shifts. She said that by placing a school on land, they were acknowledging that change was inevitable. She said that she was not opposed to how the School Board allocated funding within the 3R lists, as it was a living document.

Dr. Yeung said that she did not appreciate it when people used the CIP as a political tool to fight for their district. She said that as someone who previously served on the School Board, she had seen the district number change from 18 to 19 to 20. She said that when making decisions, it was essential to consider the impact on multiple schools, especially when they were located on separate roads within a short distance. She said that what she valued was making good decisions, strategizing, and working together to ensure Stafford County had what it needed.

Dr. Yeung said that the decision to build a school on the east side was never a problem; finding suitable land and taking the time to do so was crucial to her. She said that when Drew's proposal was brought up, many of them may not remember, but she had made her concerns known, and now the project was moving forward. She said that Dr. Chase and she had worked together on this. She said that this was about Stafford County as a whole, not just one area having limited schools. She said that they had space, and by relocating schools and people, they could create more space.

Dr. Yeung said that she wanted to make this comment because she had heard rumors circulating. She said that she occasionally came across social media noise, but she did not regularly follow it. However, when she did, she felt compelled to respond. She said that if anyone would like to discuss this further, she was accessible through her phone number and email address. She said that she was more than willing to sit down and have a conversation with them.

Mr. Diggs said that when discussing the tax rate, specifically the \$0.05 increase that had been advertised, he would like to know the average increase for a citizen or constituent in Stafford. He said that they had discussed this in the work session, but he would appreciate the clarification on this point.

Ms. Light said that it would be about \$19 per month.

Mr. Diggs said that he wanted to emphasize that he understood the concern about percentages, as they could be intimidating. He said that however, they were discussing a monthly fee of \$19 for the average user. He said that there would be some users who paid less, and others who paid significantly more. He said that he simply wanted to clarify this fact for the public.

Mr. Diggs opened the public hearing.

1. Tori Nichols, Rock Hill District, said that she was a parent and a teacher. She said that she was here tonight representing hundreds of educators across Stafford County, many of whom could not be here tonight due to it being 6:00 p.m. on a Tuesday night. She said that some were coaching soccer, feeding their children, grading papers, and others were working second jobs. She said that she was grateful for leftovers, as she had left her four children to fend for themselves tonight, because she felt it was essential to be here and have her voice heard.

Ms. Nichols said that other teachers and staff were not absent because they did not care; they did care. She said that she showed up every single day for Stafford schools. She said that however, the question they were asking tonight was, would the Board please show up for them? She said that she implored them to visit their schools and see what it was really like in the trenches. She said that she loved her job, but it was a demanding one. She said that she urged the Board to come and talk to their staff.

Ms. Nichols said that Stafford County, as the Board knew, ranked among the worst-funded school systems in the state of Virginia. She said that it was not just a statistic; it was a fact that was embarrassing and, in some cases, even dangerous. She said that from her perspective, this reality looked like teachers using their own money to purchase materials, buying food for their students, and veteran teachers leaving the profession due to low pay, excessive workload, and lack of respect.

Ms. Nichols said that they had students in overcrowded classrooms with overworked teachers and under-supported support staff due to this lack of funding. She knew that it did not have to look like this. She said that they had the power, and the Supervisors had the power to change that story. She said that she must admit, she had observed the comfortable black plush chairs they were sitting in tonight, and she was reminded of the dirty hallway where she spent her days sitting on the floor to facilitate group meetings.

Ms. Nichols said that she did not have a dedicated room, and she was not alone. She said that she urged the Board to invest in their children, not just with empty promises or well-intentioned words, but with substantial, fair funding. She requested the Board to invest in a future where they could stop apologizing for their lack of investment in public education and instead lead with pride. She urged the Board to fully fund their schools today, not some day, but now, regardless of the state budget's final outcome.

2. Giselle Pickering, Hartwood resident, said that she would like to start by sharing her personal experience. She said that her family, including her parents, moved to this County in 1990, when she was a college student. She said that at the time, she did not plan to stay, but she was proud to say that she began teaching here in 1998 and has remained at the same school ever since. She said that her parents chose this County because they wanted a house, and they had been able to witness its growth over the years.

Ms. Pickering said that they did not have the luxury of researching places online, as they did not have internet access at the time. She said that instead, they looked for a place that met their needs. She said that however, nowadays, people considered factors such as

schools and County services when deciding where to live. She said that Stafford County was known for providing excellent services, thanks to dedicated public servants like educators, librarians, and government employees who work hard to support the community.

Ms. Pickering said that people made informed decisions about where to live based on what was provided. She said that while no one enjoyed paying taxes, it was essential to recognize that taxes fund essential services like police and fire departments, teachers, and libraries. She said that as she taught her students about civic responsibility, she emphasized the importance of contributing to the community through taxes. She said that what she was asking the Board to consider was that this problem has been ongoing for a long time – it predated the recent issues and has its roots in 2008, when the housing bubble burst and the economy experienced a recession. She said that cuts were made to schools, buses, raises, steps, and other essential services.

Ms. Pickering said that what they were really asking the Board to do was to go back and restore those things, because that had never happened. She said that as a result, they continued to face this ongoing issue. She said that the problem persisted because they had not taken steps to rectify the issues that arose at that time. She said that everything had increased, and it felt like they were stuck in a cycle. She said that she appreciated the work the Board does, and she acknowledged that this was not an easy task. She said that she was asking that the Supervisors be able to realize why they were here and why they were doing this. She said that she was asking them to support them and allow them to be the place where people wanted to come, grow, and live.

3. Cliff Heinzer, Aquia District, said that he wanted to echo Dr. Marsh's comments and acknowledge the significant effort and dedication the Board had invested. He said that they indeed faced substantial challenges, including the consequences of the Dunning-Kruger effect. He said that as he had mentioned, they were currently grappling with the difficult decision of funding the County. He said that however, the truth was that if taxes were not raised, the schools would have to be cut.

Mr. Heinzer said that they had all heard the arguments from anti-school advocates, citing various faults in the system, such as teaching English to undocumented immigrants, providing take-home lunches to students during Ramadan, and blaming the decline of the school system on its increasing diversity. He said that he believed the root cause of the decline was the underfunding that had occurred over the past decade and a half. He said that it was worth noting that robust funding, as seen in the Department of Defense's school system, was crucial for good performance and had a direct link to it.

Mr. Heinzer said that if taxes were not raised this year, the school system would have to be cut. He said that even considering inflation, it was clear that a tax increase was necessary to maintain the school system's funding in real dollar terms. He said that increased spending authorized this year would not be felt by students for at least five years, as it took time for investments to bear fruit in terms of improved staffing and

programming. He said that acknowledging the reality was crucial. He said that if taxes were not raised this year, the schools would have to be cut.

4. Shannon Fingerholz, Hartwood District, said that it was not the cuts themselves that people got upset about; rather, it was the lack of responsible budgeting that frustrated everyone. What really got under people's skin was the games that were played, such as introducing last-minute ideas or keeping them hidden until the end. She said that this not only wasted time but also deprived the community of the opportunity to research and advocate for their needs.

Ms. Fingerholz said that some of the things mentioned earlier included specific organizations, such as SERVE, Empower House, Moss Clinic, and Disability Resource Center, Legal Aid, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Casa, Safe Harbor, and United Way. She said that she wanted the Board to imagine the people who benefited from these organizations. She said that these community agencies would figure out what to do even if their funding was cut because they were dedicated individuals who cared deeply about their work and were not motivated by money. She said that furthermore, the Board members probably would never notice because the people who ran those organizations were not part of the Supervisors' social circles.

Ms. Fingerholz said that it was stated by Board members during their work session that they could raise funds from private sources or volunteer, but when discussing the possibility of removing the administrative assistants to the Board of Supervisors, they felt the help they provided was essential. She said that her suggestion would be for the Board to find volunteers or use their own campaign funds to pay for their assistants. She said that she believed the assistants were extremely valuable, but so were the community agencies the Board had discussed defunding during their work session.

Ms. Fingerholz said that she had food brought to her house growing up, and her sister was on Medicaid but refused to enroll her because they said it would look bad and weak, so she did not get to go to the doctor with a double ear infection. She said that Equipment Connection helped her late husband, as well as her father, and a friend of hers found support at Empower House when she was being abused. She said that her children attended their schools, and her neighbors were dedicated educators, and her friend was a firefighter. She said that when examining those tax numbers on those papers, they were not just numbers; they were all of their community members. She said that they never knew when that hypothetical struggle became a reality to them. She said that sometimes she thought they forgot that when they did not experience it firsthand, it did not affect them, but one day it might.

5. Julie Perham, Griffis-Widewater District, said that she taught at Hampton Oaks Elementary School. She said that she was one of the 71% of Stafford County public school employees who lived in and pay taxes in Stafford County. She said that she had often heard the question about where these citizens were and why they were not at these meetings. She said that ignoring the fact that it was unfair to expect employees to come to

this location to plead for sufficient school funding, she would like to provide some answers.

Ms. Perham said that in response to the question of where the educators were: they were still at school, planning lessons, coaching sports teams, directing the school musical, tutoring students, or perhaps they were working a second job due to the insufficient pay to cover rent, student loans, and basic living expenses. She said that maybe they had a family to care for, or they were simply exhausted from the constant expectation to do more with less support. She said that she was nearing the end of her 43rd year of teaching, with the last 20 years spent in Stafford.

Ms. Perham said that throughout her career, she had noticed a consistent message from those who decided funding: "If I had a nickel, I'd give it to you; I just don't have it." She said that her response was that an organization's values could be revealed by how it chose to spend its money. She said that she questioned what the Board valued. She said that their community had consistently stated that it valued the public schools. She said that as a Board, and their predecessors, had consistently chosen to underfund the public schools. She asked how else they could explain that they currently ranked 121st out of 131 school divisions in per-pupil expenditure.

Ms. Perham said that she was aware that the Board was hearing from many of the no-tax advocates, who claimed that the only good tax was a dead tax, they argued that cutting or equalizing the tax rate was the key to making Stafford attractive to residents and businesses. She said that however, she strongly disagreed. She said that if they wanted to attract residents, they had to support your school system. She said that people moved to communities with strong public schools. She said that to attract business, they had to support the school system.

Ms. Perham said that businesses frequently cited the quality of school systems when researching new locations. She said that to support their schools, they had to support your employees. She said that buildings were merely structures; it was the people within their system that drove excellence. She said that it is the teachers who dedicated their time and resources to staying current with trends, often at their own expense.

Ms. Perham said that it was the paraprofessionals who provided a consistent, loving presence for children on difficult days. She said that it was the bus drivers who greeted their children every day, ensuring their safe transportation to and from school. She said that and it was the office staff who welcomed the public with a smile. She said that the Board must help their staff continue to do an excellent job. She requested the Board to fully fund the schools, as it was the right thing to do.

6. Colleen Danyluk said that she was an instructional paraprofessional at Hampton Oaks Elementary School. She said that she was here tonight to discuss the long-term effects of cutting their school budget. She said that when they cut their financial support for their schools, they compromised their children's access to affordable, high-quality education, as well as their future access to economic and employment mobility.

Ms. Danyluk said that according to organizations such as the Institute for Policy Studies and the American Library Association, studies had shown that access to affordable, high-quality education was crucial for obtaining high-paying jobs, particularly those driving their economy, such as technology-driven jobs. She said that when they cut funding for education, the achievement gap in education widened, and their children would face the burden of income inequality as adults.

Ms. Danyluk said that as a result, their children's future opportunities were affected, and they would become increasingly dependent on their parents' financial means. She said that considering this, she would like to ask: what kind of legacy were they leaving for their children and grandchildren in their County? She said that in closing, Stafford County Public School employees strongly advised the Board to reconsider the budget cuts for their children and their future.

7. Molly Denham, Hartwood District, said that she was here today to express her support for a tax rate of \$0.436 to fully fund the County's ever-growing needs. She said that she would like to reiterate an important point made by the County Administrator during his budget presentation, which she believed deserved more attention. She said that despite the County's \$1 billion spending budget, half of this figure comes from sources of income from outside the County and for specific expenditures only. She said that for instance, 35% of the \$1 billion comes from federal and state funds, which the County was required to forward to the schools, not to be used for other purposes.

Ms. Denham said that this money was not part of the property tax revenue, yet it was often included in the County's spending narrative. She said that it was akin to receiving money from parents to buy a gift for their grandkids, and then presenting it as if the parent had made the purchase. She said that she had done the math, and last year, only 23.2% of the money collected from residents like herself went to the schools. She said that to claim that the school was their top priority or that it was siphoning off all County funds feels dishonest to her.

Ms. Denham said that during the presentation, the County Administrator stated that a \$0.05 increase would cost an average of \$19 per month, with \$10 going directly to the schools. She said that this meant the County was now publicly committing to spending 53% of collected property taxes on the schools. She said that she could get behind this tax plan, as last year the County only spent roughly \$3.80 of her property tax money on the schools.

Ms. Denham said that however, she was aware that some members of the Board may have already made up their minds, so she may be wasting her breath in supporting the tax increase. She requested that the County properly express to the public where County taxes from County residents were going. She said that if the County planned to spend 53% of collected property tax on the schools, she was all on board with that plan; however, she did not believe that was the case this year, so she would support the tax

increase. She said that it gave her heart great happiness to see so many members of the public here at this meeting to support their schools.

8. Yasmine, Aquia District, said that she had lived in Stafford for most of her life, attended elementary school here, graduated from Brooke Point, and now she was an employee of Stafford County Public Schools. She said that she loved these schools, and while every school system had its problems, Stafford had a unique advantage - its dedicated staff.

Ms. Yasmine said that the students were amazing, and the staff members, including support staff, teachers, and maintenance workers, worked tirelessly every day to provide the best possible education. She said that despite their efforts, part of their budget was already being cut. She said that she had watched the meeting where the School Board presented the budget, specifically mentioning maintenance, and she was disappointed to see that cuts were being made to this area.

Ms. Yasmine said that she had heard many people claim to care deeply about their schools, but it was hard to take those statements seriously when they were not willing to fund the maintenance and improvements that their students deserved. She asked how they could really care about a place they would not even fund to maintain, let alone improve. She said that every student deserved the best possible education, and underfunding any part of the school system directly hurt them. She said that she understood that taxes could be difficult, and she appreciated the current challenges they were facing.

Ms. Yasmine said that however, as a community, they must step up and invest in their public schools. She said that the staff was already doing an incredible job with limited resources, and cutting their budget was senseless. She said that every year, the School Board presented a budget, and the Supervisors demanded cuts, while ignoring the ones made and demanding more. She said that this needed to stop. She said that the School Board was standing by their staff and advocating for full funding of SCPS. She said that she would like to do the same.

9. Michelle Wickman, Garrisonville District, said that she was respectfully asking that the Board set the tax rate as advertised. She said that a few weeks ago, she had stood here and urged the Board to stop the trend of making the same promises and expecting different results. She said that having spent many years advocating for change, she was clinging to her own sanity by holding out hope for a better future.

Ms. Wickman said that they often acted as if they were part of Northern Virginia, but they were not. She said that they wanted funding similar to 100% COCA, but they were not willing to pay the taxes to support it. She said that she believed that was part of the reason they did not receive COCA funding. She said that even if that funding was being reevaluated, it was clear that Virginia had historically underfunded its schools and public safety. She said that Stafford County was at the bottom of the bottom. She said that school funding and public safety should be non-negotiable.

Ms. Wickman said that those areas should not be subject to cuts. She said that those areas should be fully funded, and no cuts should be made. She said that she knew their firefighters needed their pay scales preserved. She said that there was a proposed new fire suppression unit in the CIP, which she believed should be funded. She said that they needed enough funding to support their emergency responders and ensure they could respond to emergencies without being spread too thin.

Ms. Wickman said that recently, some real action had been taken that gave her reason to hope. She said that for example, advertising the correct rate was necessary, and she appreciated that some of the Supervisors were holding joint town halls with School Board members at the end of the month. She said that she wanted to emphasize how positive this message was. She said that she had even heard the phrase "revenue share agreement" mentioned, which she found very encouraging.

Ms. Wickman said that she often used the analogy of a divorced couple without a child support agreement in place to explain the need for a revenue share agreement, and it was applicable for many reasons. She said that the kids did not just need consistency, they needed safety. She said that when they saw the people in their care fighting instead of presenting a united front, they felt unsafe. She said that when they were fighting about money, they felt unsafe and unvalued. She said that the educators, students, and families of Stafford County needed to know that the Board of Supervisors had their back financially and otherwise.

Ms. Wickman said that actions spoke louder than words, and she had seen some actions supporting positive change from several of the Supervisors, and it was more than she had expected this year. She said that there would always be those who were not open to change, and she knew who they were. She said that their voting records showed her where they stood when it came to supporting the schools, but that did not mean they could not make a different choice tonight.

Ms. Wickman asked that they imagine the things this Board could accomplish if everyone was open to personal growth, if they were willing to listen and unafraid to challenge the status quo. She said that as a homeowner in this County, a former educator here, and a mom of Stafford County students, she needed to know that they had her back, and so did the other 71% of Stafford educators who lived in this County.

Ms. Wickman said that they could go 20 minutes north and get a fully negotiated contract, a massive pay increase, and a revenue sharing agreement. She requested the Board to set the tax rate as advertised, fully fund the schools, and vote like they meant it, because this November their constituents would do the same.

10. Sarah Taylor, Falmouth District, said that she previously was part of the 71% of teachers that had lived and taught in Stafford County for 23 years. She said that she had attended every budget session here for years. She said that however, last year, she decided to take a change and work in Prince William County, where she saw a significant increase in her

pay - \$25,000 in one year. She said that as a seasoned teacher, she could offer some advice to students consistently performing in the bottom 15%.

Ms. Taylor said that at some point, they must stop making excuses. She said that this was how they were funding their schools in the bottom 15% year after year. She said that they could not continue to shift the blame to the state, COCA, or federal funding. She said that it was time to develop a plan for addressing the complications that arose. She said that just as her students claimed to be hindered by technology, family issues, or other challenges, it was essential to plan for these obstacles and strive to perform above 15%.

Ms. Taylor said that one area where Stafford excelled was in police funding, ranking third in the state of Virginia, according to police scorecard.org. She said that she would like to request that they prioritize this funding for their schools and firefighters. She said that as Frederick Douglass once said, "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men." She said that she argued that it was also more cost-effective.

11. Reverend Dr. Thomas Whittle said that he appreciated the opportunity to speak with the Board this evening. He said that as a retired military person with 26 years of service, including his time as a Vietnam veteran, he held three bronze stars, a silver star, two Purple Hearts, and a combat infantryman's badge. He said that while he could share more about his background, that was not the primary reason he was there tonight.

Dr. Whittle said that for 28 years, he dedicated his career to education, serving as a mathematics teacher in Nottaway County, a principal in Petersburg, Richmond, King George, Washington, D.C., and San Juan, Puerto Rico. He said that in all those roles, he supervised, cared for, and managed people, budgets, and finances. He said that when people looked at him, they saw someone who genuinely cared for them.

Dr. Whittle said that tonight, he was asking the Board to do the same for the teachers and other workers in your school system. He said that as a retired taxpayer, he was willing to pay more taxes if it meant supporting their educators. He said that they could make that happen, but they must be honest about it. He said that he had come a long way from his childhood, when he was a high school dropout. He said that however, he now held bachelor's degree from the University of Maryland, a master's degree from Virginia State University, a master's of divinity from Union University, and a doctorate from the University of Virginia. He said that he also completed the turnaround principal program at UVA.

Dr. Whittle said that growing up in a dysfunctional community and home, his father's struggles with addiction notwithstanding, he prioritized education and ensured his children received it. He said that he stood before the Board tonight as a testament to that. He said that he urged the Board to look at the people they saw every day in the County and say, "We will do what's right by you and the children of Stafford County." He said that he stated tonight, "with fleecy locks and black complexion, cannot forfeit nature's claim; skin may differ, but affection dwell in black and white the same," and, "were I so

tall to reach the pole, or grasp the ocean with my span, I must be measured by my soul; the mind's the standard of the man.”

12. Yolanda Roussell, Aquia District, said that she stood before the Board tonight representing not only Stafford but particularly the Stafford National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). She said that she stood before the Board with a heavy heart and a deep concern. She said that what she was about to share with the Board was a message that echoed everything they had already heard.

Ms. Roussell said that the schools in Stafford County were in crisis, and what they chose to do next would define the future of their children, property values, and the strength of the County. She said that Stafford County Public Schools were currently underfunded and under-resourced. She said that their teachers, some of the hardest-working people in the community, were among the lowest paid in the entire Commonwealth of Virginia.

Ms. Roussell said that support staff were underpaid, overworked, and overlooked. She said that due to budget constraints, extracurricular programs such as sports, music, arts, and clubs were on the chopping block. She said that she wondered how the Board could expect to retain great educators when neighboring counties were offering them \$25,000 more in salaries.

Ms. Roussell said that they could not inspire their students if they continued to strip away the programs that kept them engaged and growing. She said that it was essential to acknowledge that this did not just affect their children. She said that when school quality declined, property values dropped, and families looking for good schools were less likely to choose Stafford. She said that home values decreased, and businesses were less likely to locate there.

Ms. Roussell said that they all paid the price, not just in dollars, but in the lost potential of their entire community. She said that it did not have to be that way. She said that they were not powerless. She said that they could choose to invest in their children, their schools, and by extension, their community's future. She said that the investment may come in the form of a modest tax adjustment, averaging \$19. She said that the cost of doing nothing was much greater. She said that if they did not take action now, they would likely see larger class sizes and more teachers leaving the profession.

13. Matt Lightner, Falmouth District, said that he was here today to discuss taxes. He said that he strongly opposed any tax increase. He said that throughout his life, he had lived in four different states – Michigan, North Carolina, Texas, and now Virginia – and he had also spent time overseas with the Marine Corps. He said that the tax rate in the country where he was stationed was significantly lower than what he paid in Stafford.

Mr. Lightner said that one thing that stood out was that he paid more taxes in Stafford than in any other county he had ever lived in. He said that no matter where he had resided, he had consistently paid higher taxes in Stafford. He said that it seemed like every time they turned around, there was another tax on something. He said that he

received multiple bills in the mail, and he was always paying something. He said that the other counties he had lived in offered the same services, parks, recreation, schools, and public services that Stafford provided.

Mr. Lightner said that given the extra taxes he was paying, he did not feel he was getting significantly more than what he was getting from those other counties. He said that therefore, he urged them to find a way to compete with those counties. He said that he was not going to discuss the schools, but he would say that in the counties he had lived in, the quality of the school was a major factor in his decision to buy a home.

Mr. Lightner said that although his children were now grown, his consideration when he purchased their home in Falmouth, but in those other locations, the schools were the number one factor in deciding where they would live. He said that his wife was adamant that their children receive the best education possible, and that was the primary factor in their decision. He said that he echoed the sentiments of some of the other speakers and the gentleman who previously spoke to them. He said that he understood that making decisions was challenging, and it was not easy.

Mr. Lightner said that however, he implored the Board to find a way to make it work. He said that if they must, he believed it was essential to support the schools, as there was a significant long-term impact on them. He said that he was telling them, it made a huge difference for families with children, particularly when it came to buying a house. He said that the last thing he wanted to say before he concluded, he would like to see a Buc-ee's brought to their County.

Mr. Lightner said that anyone who opposed the Buc-ee's had not experienced the beaver nuggets or the brisket sandwiches. He said that with all these children present, it was likely they would be here every weekend. He said that they wanted to visit Buc-ee's and enjoy their food.

14. Katie Taylor, Garrisonville District, said that she would like to briefly mention that her husband was from Texas and had no interest in Buc-ee's, which they both found overrated. She said that every time she had visited one, she had almost been hit by a car. She said that she had heard a lot of discussion about finding state revenue options, and she agreed that state funds were one piece of the puzzle. She said that however, they also needed a resilient local foundation.

Ms. Taylor said that given increasingly uncertain economic forecasts nationally, and especially in Virginia, where thousands of federal workers were being laid off, local government would become increasingly important as a stabilizing force in their everyday lives. She said that in other words, they needed to take care of each other. She said that this should start with caring for and prioritizing their children, every single one of them.

Ms. Taylor said that their schools, and therefore their children's educations, were being hindered by the lack of investment in their aging infrastructure and their dedicated educators and staff, many of whom had already left for other districts and retirement. She

said that therefore, she would like to see the Board vote to increase the property tax rate by the maximum rate advertised. She said that as a parent of a Big Blue Marching Band member and a second high schooler involved in theater, she would like to see the fine arts wing for North Stafford funded.

Ms. Taylor said that these funds were not being asked for frivolously; there were several issues, including rooms that were too small and an instrument storage room that periodically flooded with sewage. She said that as the spouse of a Marine Corps veteran, Stafford was the first community she had chosen as her home in her adult life, and the schools were one of the reasons.

Ms. Taylor said that she understood that the Veteran's Tax Relief was an issue, but it was a small hill compared to the mountain of incomplete, disjointed planning and a lack of cohesive vision and managed growth. She said that she hoped that the Board could come together to help them take care of each other by funding their schools and their kids' futures.

15. Matthew Lentz, George Washington District, said he was a U.S. Army veteran, a 30-year teacher, and the proud president of the Stafford Education Association. He said that he was one of the 71% of teachers who lived in Stafford County. He said that when he accepted a job in Stafford County, he and his wife were adamant about buying a house within the County. He said that their children's education was a top priority, and they wanted to ensure that their tax dollars were benefiting them and their community. He said that they wanted the best for their children.

Mr. Lentz said that during their house search, they discovered that Stafford County was one of the wealthiest in Virginia and the country, they assumed that this wealth would translate to well-funded schools. He said that they believed that Stafford County valued its children and would prioritize their education. He said that they also assumed that politics would not be a factor in funding their schools and that Stafford would want the best schools in Virginia.

Mr. Lentz said that unfortunately, they found that politics dominated the decision-making process. He said that wanting the best for the next generation was a nonpartisan issue. He said that doing what was best for their constituents and their families should not be usurped by political pressure. He requested the Board to do what was right and fund the schools for the County's children. He said that even if they had no children in Stafford schools, it was the right thing to do for their community.

Mr. Lentz requested the Board to fund their community's future and to make Stafford County the best place to live and work for generations to come. He said that he had relocated from Arizona and experienced a 35% increase in his pay. He said that he could have moved north to do that again, but he chose to stay and fight for their schools. He requested the Board to please fund their schools.

16. Heath Hunter, Garrisonville District, said that it was disheartening for him to be there again, repeating the same narrative that had been discussed over the past three years. He said that the storylines presented by everyone here remained unchanged, and the proposed solution was to raise property taxes instead of taking responsibility to balance the budget and eliminate programs that were not working. He said that he believed that by taking his hard-earned money, they thought this would magically fix their issues.

Mr. Hunter said that he was convinced that they could fully fund the schools and other requests and they would still be at the same place next year until they were willing to take a hard look at the budget and fulfill their fiduciary duty. He said that he was starting to wonder if they truly cared about finding solutions. He said that as a property owner, he had recently had to re-examine his budget, cutting back on non-essential expenses like counseling, streaming services, and investments, due to the high cost of living and taxes.

Mr. Hunter said that he was not alone in this struggle; he was sure that many others in Stafford County were facing similar challenges. He said that he believed that more people shared his concerns than those who were advocating for tax increases. He said that he was there to appeal to the people of Stafford, to wake up and recognize that the heart of this Board was to raise taxes to the point where they were paying the same amount, if not more, than the counties to their north.

Mr. Hunter said that this would not address the issues presented today. He said that notably, the same Board members who were pushing for higher taxes were the same ones who had been advocating for it for the past three years. He said that the new member was quickly falling in line with supporting tax increases. He said that two years ago, one of the current Board members had expressed a desire to raise taxes to redistribute funds to someone else, which was essentially socialism.

Mr. Hunter said that his representative had failed to represent his interests, and he was concerned that they would not be having this discussion if they were a Business, Professional, and Occupational License (BPOL) tax. He said that although this was not part of the current budget, he would like to share a quote from Ronald Reagan.

Mr. Hunter said that "Some say shift the tax burden to business and industry, but business doesn't pay taxes... business must pass its costs of operations -- and that includes taxes -- on to the customer in the price of the product. Only people pay taxes, all the taxes. Government just uses business in a kind of sneaky way to help collect the taxes." He said that according to Reagan, when a business or individual spent more than they earned, it went bankrupt, but when the government did, the bill was passed on in two ways: higher taxes and inflation.

Mr. Hunter said that they were seeing this today. He said that he brought this up to encourage them to consider the implications of this budget. He said that if the Board voted to approve it as it stood, he believed they should demand their resignation and re-elect new representatives. He said that the consequences of higher taxes would be felt by everyone here, and this day would be remembered.

17. Sandra Pezzillo, Hartwood District, said that she owned her property there and worked in Stafford County Public Schools. She said that she had two children who attended Stafford County Public Schools, and she was proud of the schools they attend. She said that she was here to express her support for the 71%.
18. Becky Gee, Rock Hill District, said that she was one of the 71% of those who lived in Stafford County and worked in the public schools. She said that she was one of their school bus drivers. She said that she had no doubts that teachers were greatly important, but she wanted to speak on behalf of their support staff. She said that they needed a good, livable wage, as many of the residents of Stafford County would like to continue living there. She said that in her opinion, Stafford County was a great place to live. She said that she just wanted to stand up and say that they needed to fully fund their schools.
19. Dawn Shelley said that she was a resident of Spotsylvania. She said that she was a special educator in Stafford. She said that, first, she wanted to let the Stafford Board of Supervisors know that they were much better-dressed than the Spotsylvania Board of Supervisors. She said that historically, Spotsylvania had underfunded its schools significantly more than Stafford. She said she had firsthand knowledge of this, and she believed it was essential to state this fact. She said that this year, however, Spotsylvania's Board had proposed a substantial increase in funding, actually the largest allocation they had ever made.

Ms. Shelley said that it would be very embarrassing if Spotsylvania put forth the most they had ever done, and Stafford did not, or even did way less. She said that Stafford's reputation as an attractive place to live and work, particularly for highly educated residents, was at stake. She was confident that the Board understood the importance of investing in Stafford's youth and the quality of education they deserved.

Ms. Shelley said that she understood that they wanted to provide high-quality teachers and support staff, which was crucial for maintaining property values and attracting businesses. Stafford's demographics were highly educated, and it was essential to maintain this standard. She said that as educators, parents, and taxpayers, they all wanted what was best for Stafford students. She requested the Board to fully fund their schools, and she implored them to remember that this was essential for Stafford's continued success.

20. Erica Doherty, Rock Hill District, said that she was present tonight to urge the Board to set the tax rate at the advertised rate of \$0.9436 to help fund the school's emergency services and community. She said that she had heard that some members of the Board had a plan to raise revenue outside of taxes, and she looked forward to hearing about it. She said that however, she believed that no ideas would have an immediate impact on the budget that they needed now.

Ms. Doherty said that she urged the Board to raise the rate, take this year to plan and implement these ideas, and at next year's budget meeting, assess their effectiveness so

they could lower it again. She said that as a sleeper community, they often missed out on opportunities for new businesses, such as Trader Joe's, which may not be willing to locate there. She said that the Board of Supervisors had historically voted against new big businesses to maintain their unique character. She said that however, without alternative sources of tax revenue, the burden fell on residents to pay for the schools and public safety.

Ms. Doherty said that these were essential needs for the Board, the community, and for them to have a nicer community with good schools, public parks, and high home values, they must pay for it. She said that it was frustrating for residents to have to leave the County for entertainment venues like Two Silos in Manassas or a water park. She said that they then paid for those resident schools by paying their taxes. She said that they would much rather keep their tax money local. She said that instead of a "just say no" approach, they needed a long-term plan.

Ms. Doherty said that new businesses required tax incentives to build, knowing that their tax rates would increase in three to five years. She said that otherwise, they would not choose to build there. She said that the long game suggested that it was worth it to get them established there.

Ms. Doherty said that however, until they had plans for better tax revenue and had the time to finalize and implement them, the previous actions of this Board had placed the burden on them residents. She said that she would be remiss if she did not remind the Board of the potential tragedy that could have occurred last year at Rodney Thompson Middle School, when the Board was not adequately managing their County's assets. She said that it was imperative that such a situation never happened again.

Ms. Doherty said that she urged the Board to set the tax rate to the proposed rate, which was still lower than what it was in 2023, to fund their schools and community. She said that investing in their schools and community was an investment in Stafford's future. She said that failing to do so would prevent them from becoming the community of choice for generations to come.

21. Julia Lewis, Falmouth District, said that while she would appreciate it if taxes could remain low and not be raised, that did not mean she did not support their schools or teachers. She said that she was willing to pay her taxes, and she believed it was essential to do so. She said that earlier, one of the ladies mentioned that there was state funding that somehow got lumped in with their local taxes. She said that she had also heard them discuss unfunded mandates, which she believed was a significant issue.

Ms. Lewis said that Supervisor Vanuch had requested a list of these mandates, and she thought it would be beneficial for everyone to understand the extent of the money they were required to absorb in their taxes for the schools. She said that if they could better comprehend the unfunded mandates, she believed people would have a clearer understanding of why they needed to allocate funds and whether it would be possible to

seek additional money from Richmond. She said that she was aware that Senator Durant had been working to secure funding for Stafford County.

Ms. Lewis said that she hoped that in their work session today, they had been able to find a way to fully fund the schools and other essential services while reducing unnecessary expenses. She said that she appreciated the difficult job they all did and the dedication they brought to their work. She observed that and truly supported them. She said that she wanted to take a moment to express her gratitude and acknowledge the hard work and care that each of them brought to this position.

Ms. Lewis said that she understood that raising taxes may be necessary, but she would prefer it if they could avoid it. She said that she was particularly concerned about the impact on their schools, as she had seen firsthand how a lack of quality education could affect families. She said that in her neighborhood, one of her neighbors was struggling to sell his house due to concerns about the schools, and this had a ripple effect on their community. She said that she would like to see that they invested their resources in their youth, because they truly were their future.

22. Dave Kendall, George Washington District, said that he was not opposed to change, and he believed in a sense of humor. He said that he supported what they were doing, and he believed that any credible proposal should withstand scrutiny and logical analysis, whether it was in his personal life or any business deal. He said that this process was happening in Northern Virginia, where he had lived and worked for 40 years. He said that his daughter had attended school there, and even his neighbor from Alexandria, who was familiar with the area, told him that he knew what was going on and that it would happen down here too.

Mr. Kendall said that it was clear that the same discussion was taking place. He said that the schools in Northern Virginia were still seeking more funding, and as they knew, they paid a whole lot more. He said that this could lead to a never-ending cycle of asking for more. He said that as he was writing down his thoughts for this meeting, his friend sent him a note, which said, "I'm paying taxes on my wages, paying sales taxes to spend my money, paying income tax on money that was already taxed, and when I die, my kids pay the death tax on my money that was already taxed, and then people thought he was unreasonable for trying to reduce taxes."

Mr. Kendall said that he was not opposed to paying taxes; he recently finished his tax return and paid \$7,500 for real estate and property tax. He said that he was glad to contribute, but he was also passionate about scrutinizing proposals and ensuring that their system was being used efficiently. He said that when he calculated the cost of educating the new 275 students in the public schools, the total per-pupil expenditures came out to approximately \$4.2 million, yet there was a reported \$14 million shortfall.

Mr. Kendall said that he did not have the applicable information, but it made sense to him that they should subject these proposals to rigorous scrutiny, given the credibility of the analysis and the fact that their money was being spent. He said that he did not assume

that residents would automatically have to absorb additional costs without some credible analysis.

23. Mary Hanson, Falmouth District, said that she was also speaking on behalf of her elderly parents, John and Adele, who resided in the George Washington District. She said that her parents and she strongly opposed any tax increase. She said that a recent CNN survey revealed that 71% of Americans identified financial stress as a significant issue, and 76% of households lived paycheck to paycheck. She said that for fixed-income families, the 2.5% increase in Social Security and 5.8% increase in Medicare had resulted in a deficit. She said that other household costs had also risen, exacerbating the deficit.

Ms. Hanson said that many retirees had shared at previous meetings how they had had to use their life savings to pay for caregiving services, with some expenditures exceeding hundreds of thousands of dollars. She said that her parents were in a similar situation. She said that they had relocated here three years ago, as her mother required caregiving services for Alzheimer's. She said that their house costs twice as much as the home they sold in South Carolina. She said that they had been paying for caregiving services for over six years. She said that they were approaching a point where her mother should be placed in a memory care facility.

Ms. Hanson said that the cost of \$8,000 per month for room and board was prohibitively expensive. She said that it was more than the annual tuition at Harvard. She asked how a family could afford such a significant expense. She said that the 2022 Federal Reserve Survey of Consumer Finances found that 50% of Americans had less than \$8,000 in all their accounts combined. She said that a 2024 Forbes survey reported that only 28% had \$1,000.00, and 36% had \$100 or less. She said that \$19 per month mattered.

Ms. Hanson said that today was their beloved tax day. She said that a Cato Institute survey revealed that 75% of Americans desired tax cuts and were fearful that they would not be able to afford higher taxes next year. She said that two weeks ago, a public hearing was held for the Enon Road solar farm, at which the consensus of this Board was to approve the project in the hopes of saving some residents' money on their electric bill. She said that tonight, they had the opportunity to demonstrate the same level of concern for all residents by not raising their taxes.

24. Nancy Rueter said that she commended the Board members for their excellent listening skills. She said that as a counselor, being a good listener was a significant accomplishment, and she appreciated the effort they had put into listening to many people. She said that she wanted to thank them for their hard work on the budget, which was an important aspect of their role. She said that each of the Board represented a district and its needs, working collaboratively to make their County a great place to live. She said that this budget affected them all, and she appreciated the time and effort they had invested in creating it.

Ms. Rueter said that she would like to thank Mr. Ashton again for his clear and informative presentation on the process used to address the County's needs. She said that

she strongly recommended that the general public review his presentation from the March 4 Board meeting, as it provided a practical and helpful look at how the \$0.05 increase was reached to address the county's needs. She said that the budget reflected the County's priorities, being fiscally responsible and working efficiently.

Ms. Reuter said that their priorities included a thriving community, economic development, health and safety, effective and well-funded schools, and a workforce that was well-paid. She said that it was fiscally prudent, with \$4 million in cuts, a \$0.05 increase instead of a \$0.08 increase, and 70 new position requests that were not being filled. She said that every aspect of County life was impacted by this budget, although schools were approximately half of it.

Ms. Rueter said that they recognized that failure to fund the budget would have serious consequences for their students. She said that looking at the big picture, good schools had a positive impact on the community, attracting a talented workforce, potential new residents, and businesses. She said that for just \$19 a month, the average Stafford household could have all of this. She said that as the eternal optimist, she would ask that there be a unanimous vote to approve this budget.

25. Kerri Mills, Rock Hill District, said that she was present to advocate for no tax increase, but she wanted to emphasize that she strongly believed that children's education must be funded. She said that she urged the Board not to cut the budgets for the schools. She said that as a parent, she understood the importance of the teachers and staff, and she believed that children's education was crucial.

Ms. Mills said that although her own children were grown and no longer in school, she could only imagine the struggles of the parents in Rock Hill who were still navigating the education system. She said that she was asking the Board not to cut the school budgets, but she was also concerned about the burden that the tax increase would place on the taxpayers of Stafford County.

Ms. Mills said that over the past two years, taxes had increased by at least 31% in her area, and now a proposed additional 8% increase was being considered, although her numbers may be off. She said that she was worried that residents were being asked to endure even more financial strain, with no corresponding raises in their salaries. She said that modest raises of 1% to 3% were not enough to keep pace with the rising costs and tax burdens.

Ms. Mills said that she wondered why the weight of these financial responsibilities was always being placed on the shoulders of hardworking residents. She said that she was asking the Board to consider alternative options, such as exploring cuts within the County budget or increasing taxes on the large corporations that were driving growth in the area, including data centers and Amazon facilities. She said that she was particularly concerned that the Board had not demonstrated a commitment to attracting diverse, sustainable businesses that could help alleviate the financial burden on every resident in the County.

Ms. Mills said that three Board members had expressed a willingness to vote against further tax increases. She said that she asked one more Board member to join the others in standing with the people of Stafford County. She said that Mr. Diggs had stated that there was no area left in the County budget to cut. She said that however, if that was the case, then she asked, how did the Board expect every family to find room in their personal budgets to pay even more taxes? She asked if the other four Board members would stand with their residents who did not want their taxes to increase when they could not bear any more of this burden.

26. Patrick Regan, Rock Hill District, said that he strongly opposed increasing the tax rates. He said that as a business owner in this area, he had brought employees to Stafford County, and the reason they chose to move here was not only the quality schools but also the other amenities. He said that many of those employees were also volunteers in paramedic emergency services, which meant a great deal to him, and he appreciated the Board's consideration of budget constraints.

Mr. Regan said that to him, it was not a matter of what not to fund, but rather what needed to be funded. He asked the Board what their revenue streams were and how they would be met. He said that if it would not be through increased storage areas or data centers, he urged the Board not to burden taxpayers who had moved to this County for good reasons, seeking lower taxes, affordable housing, and a better quality of life. He said that for many of them, the current rate of \$19 was already a significant burden, and next year's increase would only exacerbate the issue. He thanked the Board for their time and dedication.

27. Katie Schneider, George Washington District, said that she wanted to express her enthusiasm for the possibility of paying even more in taxes, as it seemed the government had not taken enough already. She said that currently, taxes were the largest bill she paid, surpassing her mortgage and college tuition. She said that however, it was better than not having a roof over her head or an education when it came to funding committees like this one. She said that speaking of roofs, she had researched solar roofs and had been quoted \$100,000. She said that the estimated monthly savings were a mere \$100.

Ms. Schneider said that she could do basic math, but she was not sure if everyone else could. She said that that price was not a good use of her money, so they had not installed solar shingles on their house. She said that as a result, she now needed to install a fence in a field to keep her dogs safe, but she was concerned about affording the cost. She said that unfortunately, she could not even purchase the necessary materials in Stafford County because there was no local store. She said that she had to shop elsewhere, which was not beneficial to their local economy.

Ms. Schneider said that the final blow was that her son, a senior, had been accepted into Virginia Tech's engineering program, but the estimated in-state cost of attendance was \$45,000. She said that if she were not paying these taxes, maybe her child could attend Virginia Tech. She said that she would love to support every public project, but perhaps

they should prioritize the needs of taxpayers before funding every initiative. She said that they were not ATMs.

Ms. Schneider said that they should not pretend that any of this was voluntary. She said that if they did not pay, the government would take their property at gunpoint, if necessary, which was exactly what common criminals did. She said that she appreciated the Board listening, and she kindly requested that they refrain from raising their taxes simply because they could. She said that however, she also had some numbers to share. She said that it appeared that some people were suggesting a \$19 monthly fee, but her bill would increase by \$30 per month. She said that if someone was willing to pay that amount for her, she would appreciate it.

Ms. Schneider said that she already paid significantly more in Stafford County than she had on the mortgage of their first house in Jacksonville, North Carolina. She said that it was staggering to her, as Stafford County alone was taking more than she had on her mortgage. She said that she had to pay additional taxes to the state and federal governments, so on April 15, she had to stand in line at the post office, which no longer stayed open late, to pay these extra taxes. She said that to put it into perspective, she could afford to buy three houses if she were not paying taxes. She requested the Board to reconsider and find a solution to alleviate their financial burden, as nothing else seemed to be changing.

28. Paul Ortiz said that he realized the Board had been here for about two hours listening to a number of facts and information regarding dollars and cuts. He said that these decisions were not easy, and it was natural to consider paying for something when they knew they had to. He said that it was common to say they could not afford it, and many of them may indeed struggle to afford it. He said that the real question was, of the people who had come up here today, how many of them had conducted the necessary analysis to determine what needed to be cut, what should be cut, or whether additional taxes were required to pay for bills?

Mr. Ortiz said that he did not believe many of them had done this analysis. He said that he recalled sitting in one of these chairs many years ago, and it was challenging to make these decisions. He said that therefore, the real question was, before they voted, were they truly informed about the analysis they were about to make? He said that there needed to be accountability for the expenditures they made, transparency on how they spent their resources, and data to support their decisions.

Mr. Ortiz said that the question now became, did they have the time and resources to make the right decision? Was there someone in Stafford who should be responsible for this? He said that he had lived in Stafford for 50 years, from 1975, and had spent 30 years in the military. He said that in all the years he had owned a house, there had not been a year when his taxes had decreased. He said that he understood that taxes were inevitable, but what had happened to the Aquia Town Center, which had been vacant for 15 years.

Mr. Ortiz asked about the movie house that was supposed to be built on Route 610. He said that people often talked about new businesses, and it was clear that they needed excellent schools and adequate police and fire protection. He said that while some factors were beyond their control, they must move forward and make the best decisions to support their community. He said that decisions would be made based on various factors, including schools, but he had lived there for 50 years and seen firsthand how increasing costs affected residents, including his own house, taxes, and cars.

Mr. Ortiz asked were they making the most informed decisions through thorough analysis and data? He said that his daughter, who was born in 2009, understood the impact of these decisions. He said that he urged the Board to make the right decision. He said that he supported great schools, but he strongly objected to increasing taxes.

29. Heather Lukes, Rock Hill District, said that she had been attending these meetings for over 35 years, during which time she had witnessed this pattern unfold numerous times. She said that governments often resorted to threatening to cut essential services, such as schools, police, and fire departments, unless residents agreed to raised taxes. She said that instead of addressing the root causes of these issues, they relied on the fear of losing these services to persuade residents to increase their tax burden.

Ms. Lukes said that it was well known that people were willing to pay for good schools, fair compensation for teachers, and adequate funding for essential services. She said that however, when examining neighboring counties like Prince William and Fairfax, it became clear that citizens in those areas were also complaining about inadequate funding for their schools. She said that the problem in Stafford County was that it lacked a commercial tax base, unlike its neighboring counties, which had significant retail centers like Potomac Mills Mall and Spotsylvania Town Center.

Ms. Lukes said that as a result, the burden fell primarily on residents, and that was her introduction to this topic. She said that today was Tax Day, serving as a poignant reminder of the sacrifices that hardworking residents made and the limited returns they often received. She said that while families struggled to make ends meet, sorting through receipts and wondering how they would cover their expenses, they were once again discussing the possibility of raising property taxes.

Ms. Lukes said that she wanted to be clear that this was not just another bill; it was another cut, another piece taken out of people who were already doing everything they could to stay afloat. She said that for many, it felt like a death by a thousand cuts. She said that they had mentioned that this was an average increase of \$19, but for some people, it was \$25 to the federal government and \$75 to the state of Virginia.

Ms. Lukes said that eventually, like with subscription services, people would look at their budget and realize that they were paying an extra \$1,000 per month due to the cumulative effect of increased taxes. She said that her utility costs were increasing due to Virginia Power's decision to cover the costs of additional expenses, such as paying for power to support other organizations' data centers, which was a significant undertaking. She said

that while it was essential to discuss revenue for County services, it was also necessary to examine their own spending habits.

Ms. Lukes said that instead of asking for more from residents, they should strive to manage their resources more efficiently, as people are not just tired, but also financially strained. She said that on this tax day, they should refrain from adding to their burden. She said that they should demonstrate to their residents that local government understands their challenges and is willing to put in the necessary work, rather than simply passing the responsibility on.

30. Tar-ek Mahfouz, Rock Hill District, said that he and his wife strongly opposed the tax increase. He said that as a couple living on a fixed income, they were constantly facing increased expenses, including their electric and gas bills, and now the real estate tax. He said that it seemed to him that the County was overspending, and the credit card analogy fit. He said that he would like to know what would be done within a few years to address this issue.

Mr. Mahfouz asked if the real estate tax would be increased again. He said that it was alarming. He said that with people losing jobs, it was particularly inopportune to raise the real estate tax now. He said that they had moved to Stafford in 1992. He said that their daughter had attended public schools here, and he wished to thank the school teachers and public schools for providing her with a wonderful education. He said that at the time of their move, Stafford had a thriving town center with a coffee shop called Gargoyles, a movie theater, and excellent restaurants.

Mr. Mahfouz asked what had happened to this. He said that the area now appeared to be a neglected and run-down site. He said that he was sorry to say it, but it looked like a dump. He said that he did not understand why it had been allowed to deteriorate if it could not be revitalized. He asked why had the County had let this happen. He said that the loss of revenue for the County was evident, as residents were forced to travel to Fredericksburg to dine, watch movies, and shop, resulting in lost business for local establishments.

Mr. Mahfouz said that the County must do something with the Aquia Town Center, in particular, which was an eyesore. He said that the years of abandoned concrete pipes since 1992 were a stark contrast to its former beauty. He said that he did not comprehend why this had happened. He asked why the outcome of this piece of land was two blocks of concrete, along with all the empty businesses. He said that his second issue he would like to discuss was the car tax. He said that it was unreasonable that he continued to receive the bill after 10 years, considering the car was old. He said that they needed to find ways to cut the budget. He said that for those living on a fixed income, it was particularly challenging. He asked what could be done to alleviate this burden.

Mr. Mahfouz said that the decline of retirement plans was a concern, as the dollar's value was weakening and prices were increasing. He said that for example, the cost of four tires for a small Honda had risen to over \$1,000. He said that increasing taxes and anticipating

future hikes would only exacerbate the issue. He said that it was unacceptable. He requested the Board to review the budget and identify potential loopholes that could be addressed, which would ensure that school teachers and the School District received their due, while avoiding further over-taxation.

31. Bonnie Thoman, Rock Hill District, said that she was here to support the schools. She said that as stated by one of the speakers, Stafford County Public Schools ranks 121st out of 131 schools in terms of expenditures per pupil, placing them in the bottom 8%. She said that they did not have far to go to reach dead last. She said that she had lived in this County for almost 45 years. She said that she had witnessed a new school being built almost every year in the 1980s and 1990s.

Ms. Thoman said that during that time, they were growing rapidly, and they managed to maintain the quality of their school system despite the growth. She said that parents sought out their county to move to, attracted by their excellent schools. She said that however, in the late 2000s, the construction of new schools slowed, and the existing ones became overcrowded. She said that portable classrooms were introduced, and some schools were refurbished or expanded, but none were replaced with new buildings.

Ms. Thoman said that unfortunately, this did not alleviate the overcrowding issue. She said that over the past 15 years, they had seen a decline in their standing as a sought-after school system. She said that she believed the reason for this was the lack of support for the school budget. She said that every year, the Superintendent and School Board presented a budget to the Board of Supervisors, demonstrating their efficiency and efforts to meet the needs of the schools.

Ms. Thoman said that however, despite their efforts, the Board consistently failed to raise taxes and fund the schools adequately. She said that therefore, this cycle of underfunding would not be resolved without the Supervisors' support. She said that Stafford County students deserve better than what they had received over the past 15 years. She said that as a Board, they had the power to break this cycle and prioritize the betterment of Stafford County and its school system.

32. Kathy Kimmitz, George Washington District, said that she would like to offer a different perspective on why she did not want the taxes raised. She said that she had been a resident of Stafford for over 60 years, and she had a pothole at the end of her driveway that she had tried to get repaired multiple times, and it remains unfixed. She said that while she was willing to consider a higher tax rate, she believed they need to see tangible benefits in return.

Ms. Kimmitz said that if raising taxes will ultimately benefit residents, who bear the increased burden, then she was in favor of it. She said that if they were not getting something in return, she was not convinced it was worth it. She said that when reviewing the budget summary, she saw that the median home price is \$529,000, and the median income is \$133,000. She said that she was concerned that teachers may be unable to afford living in the County.

Ms. Kimmitz said that while the teachers were worried about the schools not getting money, they would not even be able to live here. She said that she noticed that the education was is a significant driver of their spending. She said that she wholeheartedly supported education, as both her kids and grandkids went to public schools. She said that however, as one of the previous speakers mentioned, an analysis was necessary. She said that greater transparency was needed. She said that for instance, she recently discovered that Stafford County received \$18 million from the Virginia lottery in 2024. She said that she would like to know how this funding is being allocated for K-12 education, in addition to the budget the Board was reviewing.

Ms. Kimmitz said that another key consideration was the vacancy savings. She said that as someone with experience in managing lapse funding from her time working for the federal government, it could allow them to be more efficient with their resources. She said that if they were examining the vacancy savings, those were funds that represented the difference between the amount allocated for personnel expenses in a budget.

Ms. Kimmitz said that she was aware that by reviewing the open positions on Stafford County's website, there must be a substantial amount of savings in that area. She asked, if these positions were not being filled, then why was additional funding being requested, and sometimes approved by departments to fill positions that were already vacant? She said that the possibility of reallocation of funds to schools, education, or other county initiatives was worth exploring.

Ms. Kimmitz said that balancing a budget was not an easy task. She said that she hoped each of the elected Supervisors would do their part to ensure that County funds were being spent wisely, appropriately, and resourcefully for their constituents. She said that she hoped the Board would not fall into a status quo approach. She said that instead, she encouraged them to think creatively and find ways to benefit their constituents. She said that they should get creative, do what they could for the people, and work to maintain the trust of the voters who had elected them. She said that she appreciated all the hard work that they did. She said that the Supervisors all deserved it, and so did the residents.

33. Steve Schwartz said that to clarify, when they discussed tax cuts, they were actually referring to funding cuts, not tax cuts. He said that they were not asking to reduce taxes, but rather to maintain the current rate. He said that they were aware that the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) had found ways to reduce spending in the federal government, and a recent report by the Mississippi State Auditor uncovered \$400 million in fraud, which was inspired by DOGE.

Mr. Schwartz was puzzled by the Democrats' concern about the nation's capital, as well as the similar issues they were facing in Stafford. He said that some government officials and School Board members seemed content to accept the costs without scrutinizing them, and instead relied on internal reviews. He said that their schools needed funding, and they had seen an increase in funding over the past three years. He said that however, they must

carefully review their budgets and consider external reviews. He said that if everything was efficient, there was no need for concern.

Mr. Schwartz said that instead, they were stuck in a rut and expected to throw more money at the problem. He said that Mr. Parkin, who was here tonight, had made some statements in an article called "Choose Your Hard." He said that Mr. Parkyn stated that residents of this community should essentially accept the situation, while the Board chose not to make difficult decisions. He said that the Board served the people of Stafford, and currently, 62% of the Stafford County budget was borne by residential homeowners.

Mr. Shwartz said that he agreed with Mr. Parkyn that someone should make the hard decisions, and that someone was the Board. He said that he suggested reviewing the contracts of both the Board and the School Board to identify potential efficiencies and inefficiencies. He said that a review of the Board's contracts was not the same as an audit of the budget. He said that often, the focus was on the money rather than finding a solution.

Mr. Shwartz said that there were other issues at play. He said that he believed the recent publicity surrounding the Supervisors and the mobilization of taxpayers to speak out against the tax increase had highlighted the concerns of the community. He said that he observed this tonight, and he would say that there was a growing organization of taxpayers who were concerned about where the County's money was being spent and the potential increase in taxes.

34. Brian McNally, Rock Hill District, said that he would like to acknowledge the teachers, unions, and their organization, whose message he found wholesome and cherished. He said that it was clear that everyone there valued the importance of their children and communities. He said that he did not think anyone there could dispute that. He said that however, he asked that they not overlook the constituents who had slightly different opinions, who were also raising children and working long hours. He said that they may not be as organized as some of the fellow teachers, who were also at home managing their families and careers.

Mr. McNally said that he did not believe that raising taxes and caring for their school system and children were mutually exclusive. He said that he believed they had heard many people ask the Board to take a hard look at the financial situation and acknowledge the dedication and leadership that they brought to their roles. He said that he had had some interesting conversations with Ms. Vanuch, their district representative, who had been transparent about the poor business decisions made by the County over the past decade.

Mr. McNally said that he believed it was now the Board's responsibility to make sound business decisions, to examine efficiencies, and to avoid relying on the backs of property owners. He said that the numbers were concerning, with a 31% increase over the last three years and an estimated 8% to 9% increase over the next four years, totaling 39% over the entire period. He said that these numbers varied widely across the County, and

the Board members were highly educated and successful individuals, so they should understand economics, and the concept of a trickle-down effect, as well as the second and third-order effects of taking resources from individuals and reorganizing their budgets.

Mr. McNally said that they were also considering the impact on local spending and the economy. He said that he acknowledged that the school system was facing a deficit, and they had essential requirements, but he believed these issues were not mutually exclusive. He requested the Board to explore all possible solutions to support their teachers and students, without placing undue burdens on their property owners.

35. Michael Parkyn, Garrisonville District, said that he was happy to be here. He said that it was kind of nice to write something and have someone talk about it, even if they disagreed. He said that the point of civics was to listen to one another. He said that wanted to address a few points that had been made recently, especially tonight. He said that it was ironic that the Chair had cautioned about individuals on social media spreading misinformation and clouding the issue, because the worst offenders were seated to the left and the right of the Chair at this very moment.

Mr. Parkyn said that he first wanted to discuss the “tax alerts.” He asked how one-sided alerts designed to provoke anger contributed to constructive conversation. He said that they did not. He said that their purpose was to stifle conversation. He said that this was not the Board’s job. He said that he would also like to discuss the advertised rate, which had been discussed in a civil manner tonight. He said that it was interesting that the same people who had spoken civilly about an advertised rate tonight were vocal in their criticism last year when other Supervisors had brought up the same issue.

Mr. Parkyn said that next, he would like to mention promises made in 2022 regarding the use of an ARPA funds to pay for Sheriff’s deputies’ raises. He said that former Supervisor Coen had expressed concerns about adopting this plan, citing the risk of future costs being passed on to the public. He said that other Supervisors here tonight had expressed support for that potential tax raise, yet this year it seems they had forgotten that promise.

Mr. Parkyn said that he would like to discuss the tax rate and hear the thoughts of those present. He said that the fixed-income parents and retired couples, as well as the Stafford School teachers, were correct. He said that while everyone thought they might have differing opinions, they were all correct, and the Board was not helping at all. He said that he would like to point out that the residential real estate tax collections per house in this area were lower than average for Virginia, ranging from Fairfax to Chesterfield. He said that he had verified this information that day.

Mr. Parkyn said that it was puzzling that the Board allowed people to move forward with this expectation of a low tax rate, given the lack of commercial revenue, and yet still believed they could receive services for free. He said that this was the root of the problem. He said that by shutting down conversation and failing to convey the hard truth, the Supervisors were compromising their integrity. He said that he firmly believed that this was the issue at hand.

36. Zaida Gipson said that she had been a proud U.S. citizen since 1975. She said that she chose to become an American, and she was very proud of that. She said that she had lived in Virginia since the 1960s. She said that she had retired from Alexandria and moved to Stafford in 2020, just as COVID-19 was hitting. She said that she was so happy to be here. She said that she loved this particular County. She said that she did not have any young children; they were all grown.

Ms. Gipson said that she understood the school situation; however, she did not see any place where toddlers, middle-aged children, or teenagers can go to have some activities. She said that she did not see any parks, nor does she see any outdoor and indoor recreation centers for them. She said that this was very sad, because there was nowhere for these kids to go. She said that however, right by Mountain View High School, where she lived, they were having a dog park.

Ms. Gipson said that she could not understand why they would make a dog park instead of a recreational area for children to have activities, which would also provide a complementary amenity for the teachers who worked with their children. She said that she did not understand why they had to drive to Woodbridge or Fredericksburg to have enriching activities for their children. She said that she found this very sad. She said that she loved this place, but their children deserved better.

37. Jeff Eastland, Rock Hill District, said that he had been here since 1975. He said that a lot had changed since then, and it was accelerating rapidly. He said that he was a retired entrepreneur, and his wife, Elena, who was with him tonight, was a retired schoolteacher. She said that she spent 32 years teaching in Stafford schools, making history as the first special education learning disabilities teacher in the County's history in 1976. She said that she was a pioneer in the field and has spent thousands of dollars out of her own pocket to improve the educational experience for her students.

Mr. Eastland said that he was heartily against underfunding schools, but he had one question for the Board tonight. He asked what would happen next, when the tax rate became unsustainable, the cost of living and housing made the County unaffordable, and their landscapes were transformed into warehouses, data centers, solar farms, and gas stations? He asked what they would do with unbreathable air, undrinkable water, and unbearable traffic.

Mr. Eastland said that he saluted the Board members for their courage and conviction in voting against some of these ill-advised follies and for suggesting alternative solutions that could provide essential services like education without burdening taxpayers. He said that perhaps it was time to consider shifting the responsibility to corporations, developers, and those who were profiting from the citizens' resources. He said that this Board must come together, slow down, and figure out a solution before it was too late. He said that they were at a critical point right now.

38. Cherie Smith, Garrisonville District, said that she agreed with the previous speaker, but as a leader, she was always taught to not come to anyone with a problem without having a solution. She said that Stafford offered a business professional and occupational license (BPOL) tax, which could be applied to the gross receipts of any business currently operating in Stafford. She said that however, Stafford had elected not to implement this tax.

Ms. Smith said that she understood the difficulty in making these decisions, especially with rising costs. She said that paying employees was essential, and their schools, roads, and infrastructure needed funding. She said that she believed it was crucial to find alternative solutions that did not burden residents. She said that Stafford's low property tax rate and accelerated depreciation for businesses were notable. She said that for businesses, this meant they could depreciate their property by 35% in the first year, 30% in the second year, and 25% in the third year, resulting in a lower taxable property value and reduced tax liability.

Ms. Smith said that as a homeowner, she did not receive the same benefit, as her property did not depreciate, and therefore, her taxes did not decrease. She said that additionally, Stafford offered an elimination of machinery and tools tax, which reduced the overall tax burden for businesses in manufacturing, mining, processing, broadcasting, and other industries. She said that the technological zone incentive also provided a lower tax rate for big businesses, which could be seen as unfair to residents who contributed to the local economy.

Ms. Smith said that she urged the Board to consider this discussion and make an informed decision. She said that the urban development planning, which was implemented about 10 or 12 years ago, was a good idea at the time, but their budget had changed significantly since then. She said that they needed to re-examine their budget, which was currently set for 2025, not 2015. She said that as a result, they must revisit the terms of the agreement and renegotiate with the businesses to ensure they were contributing their fair share, rather than relying on residents to bear the burden.

39. Shamgar Connors, Hartwood District said that he had been saying it was insane that the School Board requested more funding despite continuing to hold Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) meetings, which would result in a \$44 million loss of federal funding. He said that he was aware that they were required to sign a new form stating they had eliminated DEI programs, which they were supposed to do last week or Friday. He said that he found it insane that the School Board wanted to ask for more money for schools when they planned to hire 36 new teachers for 4,800 English language learner (ELL) students.

Mr. Connors said that although they claimed it was a state requirement, they consistently ignored other state requirements. He said that the real reason for this was that each student enrolled received \$13,111 in funding. He said that if they calculated this, 4,841 students multiplied by \$13,111 equals \$64 million. He said that this was the true motivation behind their push for more funding, and they obfuscating the facts from the

public. He said that he had pointed this out. He said that most likely, the majority of these students were undocumented immigrants.

Mr. Connors said that he was still disturbed that the School Board, and some of its members, justified this. He said that in fact, all of them did. He said that a few members of the Board of Supervisors defended this, suggesting they should allow undocumented immigrants to stay and receive funding. He said that they claimed they should prioritize their needs. He said that this was unacceptable. He said that he recalled when someone had said this, and it was embarrassing.

Mr. Connors said that just a few weeks ago, the top MS-13 leader had been caught in Woodbridge. He said that MS-13 members often had children involved in the gang, who engaged in human trafficking, drug trafficking, and other crimes. He said that perhaps they should consider bringing one of their associates into their homes. He said that he had lost a great deal of faith that the Board of Supervisors was supposed to be interested in their safety, but some members were making excuses to justify the illegal invasion of their country. He said that he questioned whether School Board members were housing and paying for the illegal aliens themselves.

Mr. Connors said that it seemed that some individuals wanted to appear to be doing the right thing, even if it meant continuing the issue. He said that he was asking everyone to figure out the budget. He said that CNN reported that Democrats had a 20% approval rating. He said that it was clear that pushing for infinite tax increases was not a winning strategy. He said that the Democrat Party was experiencing complete and utter destruction, with losses occurring every single day. He said that the Board could put stipulations on the budget, such as eliminating the 36 teacher program and disbanding the DEI committee, and then allocate the funding accordingly.

Mr. Connors said that however, transparency was lacking, as the Board claimed that the budget was transparent, yet receipts were not available. He said that citizens had to fill out FOIA requests and pay for them to see where their taxpayer dollars were going. He said that it was absurd that taxpayers had to pay to see where their money was being spent. He said that this lack of transparency was screaming fraud, and if the Board did not want to show receipts, it implied that they had something to hide. He said that to regain trust, the Board should stop increasing taxes and increase transparency.

40. Deanna Fisher, Garrisonville District, said that she was respectfully asking the Board members all to vote against the tax increase and instead explore ways to reduce spending and support the residents of Stafford. She said that a tax increase at this time would have a significant impact on many families in Stafford and would be detrimental to their community. She said that every organization could find ways to cut spending. She said that currently, every family in Stafford was having to make adjustments, and it was disrespectful to raise taxes at this time.

Ms. Fisher said that she considered the uncertainty of this year. She said that many residents in Stafford were government employees who had lost their jobs, including her

family and others. She said that in addition to job losses, there was inflation and uncertainty surrounding stocks, retirement income, Social Security, and many other aspects of life. She said that surrounding counties had chosen not to increase taxes, and Stafford needed to follow suit.

Ms. Fisher said that it would be particularly insulting to residents if they were to increase taxes to provide more funding for schools, given that the School Board had refused to answer questions, put federal funding at risk to maintain a DEI committee, and failed to be transparent in their efforts to lower spending. She asked what specific cuts the School Board had made. She said that it was clear to her that the School Board was more interested in justifying their budget increase without regard for Stafford's citizens and the learning issues in their schools.

Ms. Fisher said that throwing more money at a problem without addressing the underlying issues had never been an effective solution. She said that the School Board was requesting millions of dollars for 37 additional English second language teachers for over 4,800 students who were not citizens. She asked how many of these students were Stafford citizens. She asked what about teachers for students who were citizens. She said that the presence of non-citizen students was overcrowding their schools.

Ms. Fisher said that President Trump had signed an executive order to stop federal spending on individuals who were in the country illegally. She said that as the Board of Supervisors, they were required to put Stafford citizens first. She said that they should not be raising taxes to educate individuals who were not citizens. She said that they should be refusing to follow the mandate still in place by the state and standing up for what was right, as other states such as Ohio and Oklahoma had done. She said that they should not raise taxes to fund criminal activities. She said that the School Board to hold them accountable for finding ways to save money and addressing the real issues in their schools.

41. Ms. Fisher said that they needed common sense. She said that she wanted the schools to have their needs funded. She said that last month, Senator Reeves and other local state representatives stated that the schools across the state were requesting more and more funding, but education was getting worse. She said that they claimed that money was not the problem. She said that she believed that the individuals advocating for full funding of the schools, regardless of the cost, were uninformed about how the money was being spent and the potential cuts that could be made. She requested the Board to not raise taxes.

Michelle Custer, Falmouth District, said that she was an educator for Stafford County Public Schools. She said that she taught the Head Start program at Rising Star, which served three- and four-year-old children. She said that as a single mom of four, she was here today to respectfully ask that the Board consider not increasing taxes. She said that as an educator, she was aware that their salaries are not commensurate with their qualifications, and she had worked hard to earn three degrees, including an associate's,

bachelor's, and master's degree. She said that unfortunately, due to her divorce, she had to find roommates to live in Stafford County, which was a difficult adjustment.

Ms. Custer said that she moved here from Northern Virginia primarily because of the lower taxes and the quality of the schools. She said that Stafford County Public Schools were exceptional, with dedicated teachers and a strong sense of community. She said that she appreciated the efforts of the Board members, who truly cared about their constituents. She said that however, she begged the Board not to consider a tax increase at this time. She said that the additional \$19 per month would be a significant burden for her, and she was concerned that it would impact her children's education.

Ms. Custer said that her daughter volunteers at the Station 7 Fire Department, and her son was also planning to work for the County, so they understood the importance of giving back to the community. She said that there was a new development being built in her neighborhood, and their schools were already so overcrowded that she did not know where they would put all those students in the buildings. She said that they should probably be focusing on that and not on increasing taxes. She said that they also determine how to allocate their budget to ensure they could pay their teachers a more competitive salary, allowing them to maintain a high quality of life in Stafford County. She said that she would greatly appreciate it if they could explore options for stabilizing taxes or finding other ways to support their teachers.

42. Dr. Alicia Hunter said that she was grateful to be here tonight after gymnastics and preparing dinner so that she could speak as a parent and a career educator with 15 years of experience. She said that they supported the advertised tax rate because they had a local revenue problem, and it was time to stop pretending. She said that for years, Stafford had disproportionately developed residential communities that attracted families with school-age children, but without a sustainable plan to fund the schools that served them. She said that this was not oversight; it was intentional.

Dr. Hunter said that there was a time when schools were the pride of this County, and investing in public education was a shared value, not a political wedge. She said that many of those who now resisted new investment were the very ones who had benefited from it. She said that their children had attended well-funded schools, and their property values had risen. She said that they had experienced a Stafford built on shared responsibility. However, now that their children were grown, it felt like they had pulled the ladder of opportunity up behind them. She said that this was not just short-sighted; it was unjust.

Dr. Hunter said that the truth was, they should have seen this coming. She said that as W. Edwards Deming said, every system was perfectly designed to get the results it got. The strained schools, underpaid teachers, and families questioning their moves there were not accidents; they were the outcome of a system built for growth, not sustainability. She said that supporting the advertised tax rate was just the start. She said that it helped them catch up to the needs they had ignored too long, but it could not be the ceiling of their ambition; it must be the floor.

Dr. Hunter said that Stafford must grow a strong commercial tax base so they were not asking homeowners alone to carry the weight of a growing school system. She said that this was how they built a sustainable future, not through fear, but through vision. She said in Stafford Vision 2040, "Stafford County public schools represent the highest quality education in the Commonwealth, preparing our children for the future."

Dr. Hunter said that slogans did not teach children, strategic plans did not lower class sizes, budget votes did, and this vote mattered. She said that this was not just about schools; it was about whether they were a community that uplifted others or one that prioritized personal gain. She said that her daughter was standing with her tonight, and she deserved a community that did not perpetuate a cycle of inequality. She said that she wanted her daughter to strive to create a community that holds the ladder steady for those who come after her.

43. Joe Bertoldi, Rock Hill District, said that he was present to express his opposition to the proposed expanded tax rate. He said that he had moved to Stafford 12 years ago from Illinois, seeking better opportunities and a more affordable lifestyle. He said that what initially drew him to Stafford was the lower tax rate, the financial incentives, and the amenities available in the area. He said that over the past 12 years, however, he had witnessed the amenities dwindle and the tax rates increase dramatically.

Mr. Bertoldi said that the tax rate had risen to 31% in the last four years. He said that by continually raising taxes, they were effectively discouraging him and his family from staying. He said that he was aware that this was not a unique situation, as he had seen it happen in other places, such as Illinois, California, and Maryland. He said that he wanted to commend and praise those who had committed to maintaining the current tax rate. He said that he also wanted to encourage and support those who had previously promised not to raise taxes. He said that he wanted them to refrain from raising their taxes and to maintain the current rate.

44. Renee Kendall, George Washington District, said that it was mentioned that a school teacher had left Stafford County for Prince William County, where she was now earning \$25,000 more. She said that if she had chosen to move to New York, she would likely be earning even more, and if she moved to Orange County, she would be making less. She said that they were here to discuss a budget, and she would like to illustrate how it worked by comparing it to a pie plate.

Ms. Kendall said that the budget consisted of various entities, each with its own needs and requirements. She said that according to the pie chart available online, the budget was allocated as follows: schools received approximately 59.5% of the budget, general government received 21.5%, Utilities received 12.8%, Transportation received 2.9%, Fire and Rescue received 1.7%, and other services received 1.77%. She said that she was curious to know what other services entailed, as it was a relatively small percentage of the overall budget. She said that the schools were of utmost importance, and it was

impossible to dispute their significance. She said that the children were the future generation, and their education was crucial.

Ms. Kendall said that however, it was also essential to acknowledge that there were schools that excelled, even among the top 10%, while charging lower per pupil rates than Stafford County. She said that in contrast, their children's performance was lower on the charts. She said that the key to effective education lay in teaching the fundamental subjects, including reading, writing, arithmetic, and other core subjects. She said that it was puzzling that despite this focus, their test scores were so low. She said that on the other hand, schools that received more funding and had lower per pupil rates often achieved higher test scores.

45. Eric Dupont, George Washington District, said that it was a challenging time of year, as it was budget season. He said that he appreciated knowing that each member of the Board of Supervisors made decisions with the best interests of Stafford County in mind. He said that he could only imagine the difficult choices they must make, given their personal connection to the community. He said that he commended them for their service to the community and said that he appreciated the work they did. He said that as a teacher in Stafford County Schools, he had a personal stake in the education system. He said that his daughter was in third grade, and his son would be starting kindergarten here next year.

Mr. Dupont said that he was proud to work for Stafford County Schools, and he was confident that the dedicated teachers did a great job for their students. He said that he was proud to share his children with them every day. He said that as someone with a minor in economics, he had noticed that numbers could be manipulated in various ways. He said that he understood that this could be done, even by those who claimed to be objective. He said that however, he did not believe that high taxes in Stafford County were paid for something that was not being delivered.

Mr. Dupont said that he believed that their high home values were reflected in the taxes they paid. He said that many had argued that they could not get something for nothing, and he thought this principle applied to their schools as well. He said that unfortunately, they spent less per pupil than the state average, which was a concern. He said that he believed that their taxes were a good investment, reflecting the value of their homes in the community. He said that he hoped the Board would continue to invest in their schools, building on the progress made in recent years.

46. Alexander Regan, Aquia District, said that he was here to respectfully ask for the Board's support of the advertised increase to real estate tax. He said that as a former student of these schools, and having two generations of his family who had worked in these schools, he believed it was essential to fund them. He said that the schools had played a significant role in shaping him into an active citizen who was committed to his community, and he knew that the Supervisors all shared this dedication. He said that they needed to prioritize funding their schools, and he hoped they would consider that request.

47. Wanda Grayson, Garrisonville District, said that she could appreciate whatever side of the tax decision the Board members were on, whether for or against, because she truly understood it, having managed funds and supported programs. She said that ultimately, they would win or lose, regardless of the stance. She said that however, she must ask that if the Board voted to raise taxes, that it be complemented with something other than just raising taxes. She said that when she moved to Garrisonville 22 years ago, she found the School District before she found her home.

Ms. Grayson said that in fact, the school district was a major factor in her decision to move. She said that she understood the importance of the schools and supported the teachers and education, especially now more than ever. She said that as someone living on a fixed income, she was concerned about the proposed \$19 tax increase. She said that without clear details on how this increase was calculated, she was uncertain. She said that in the time she had lived in Stafford, her homeowner tax increase had never been as low as \$19.

Ms. Grayson said that this year, her medical insurance had increased by \$50, and her homeowner's insurance had increased by \$149, totaling \$2,400 in additional costs. She said that she was not opposed to any tax increase, but she believed it should be accompanied by measures to offset the burden. She said that as residents of Stafford, while they slept in their homes in Stafford, they did not live in Stafford; they lived everywhere else. She said that they were losing quality of life, and their community lacked essential amenities such as movie theaters, bowling alleys, and other revenue-generating businesses.

Ms. Grayson said that simply duplicating existing conveniences, such as McDonald's, only split the revenue and not provide a meaningful solution. She said that recreating and duplicating the conveniences of the existing McDonald's locations, they were essentially splitting the revenue generated by the McDonald's, where the one on Route 143 may have previously been the highest tax-paying location, but by introducing a new McDonald's at exit 140, they were only splitting the tax revenue, which did not increase.

Ms. Grayson said that if they were going to increase taxes, she believed they should consider alternative measures to support the County, as they could not continue to dig themselves into a financial hole by limiting the revenue of their residents. She said that by doing so, they risk deterring people from moving to the area, and those who already live there will struggle to afford their homes, ultimately leading to a decline in property values. She said that this would result in a vicious cycle where they lose both residents and the ability to sell their homes.

48. Chad Papenfus, Aquia District, said that he had been involved in state and local governments in Minnesota the past, and had lived in Stafford for about 15 years. He said that he had been a resident of Stafford County since 2009, and he had seen a consistent theme. He said that it appeared that the Board was in a mud pit of advertising rate increases, only to sometimes hold the line. He said that this year, they were proposing

another increase. He was reviewing the budget that Mr. Ashton presented, which was approximately \$1 billion.

Mr. Papenfus said that he may not have done well in math, but 10% of a billion was \$100 million. He said that he believed they needed to examine the different categories that a previous speaker had discussed. He said that roughly 60% of the budget was allocated to the School District and 21% to government services. He said that as someone who had worked in the federal government, he could attest that they had faced significant cuts in recent years. He said that they had had to absorb those cuts, and it was not easy. He said that to suggest that a 2% or 4% reduction in the budget was not feasible was misinformation.

Mr. Papenfus said that they needed to scrutinize their expenditures more closely. He said that he was confident that they could find 2% to 4% in savings. He said that to maintain this year's tax rates at \$0.89, they should focus on building a commercial tax base with the upcoming data centers and leveraging the growth of great housing developments. He said that they did not need to be the highest taxed jurisdiction; rather, they should avoid increasing taxes unnecessarily. He said that by diversifying their revenue streams, they could avoid going back to the well every time they needed more funding for local government.

Mr. Diggs closed the public hearing and the matter rested with the Board. He asked if any Board members had questions for Ms. Light.

Ms. Vanuch said that she had a question regarding the commercial transportation impact fees. She said that she was wondering if the action they were about to take would eliminate the need for transferring funds from the General Fund to the transportation fund. She asked if they had removed that from the budget.

Ms. Light said that she believed Ms. Vanuch was referring to the Board's allocation of approximately \$7.5 million in ongoing personal property tax, which was dedicated to transportation, and about \$1 million in one-time funding. She said that this was part of their financial policies, specifically one of the buckets they filled each year, should they have year-end savings. She said that this amount had not been removed from their budget.

Ms. Vanuch said that she believed that should be taken out of the budget.

Ms. Light said that if the Board directed staff to remove that item from the budget, they would also remove it from the transfer to the Transportation Fund.

Mr. Diggs asked if that decision was going to lock them into the 30% they had just voted on.

Ms. Vanuch said that no, they currently had that money allocated to pay for the transportation impact fees associated with the data centers. She said that whatever they ended up voting on, they would not have to do that.

Ms. Bohmke said that she wanted to ensure that she understood the conversation. She said that they typically allocated \$7.5 million from the General Fund to the transportation fee. She said that Ms. Vanuch suggested that they could leave this amount within the General Fund, rather than transferring it to the Transportation Fund, as they would receive the necessary fees from the development community once the proposed transportation impact fees were approved at the public hearing.

Ms. Vanuch said that was correct, and they currently had earmarked funding to pay for the data centers that were coming online, which would actually offset the costs for taxpayers. She said that they should consider taking it out.

Ms. Allen asked Ms. Light if that would impact any transportation projects getting ready to start.

Bryon Counsell, Chief Director of Infrastructure, said that he believed the question was whether commercial entities were required to pay the fee themselves, which would eliminate the need for the transfer from the General Fund to the Transportation Fund. He said that that was true. He said that currently, they had estimated approximately \$800,000 in commercial Tax Increment Financing (TIFs) to be paid.

Mr. Counsell said that the current rate, historically about \$1.8 million per year in total Tax Increment Financing (TIF) dollars paid to the Transportation Fund. He said that some of these dollars came from residential development, while others came from commercial. He said that if the rates remained the same as today, that was what they projected every year. He said that they had maintained this projection because they did not have an exact amount or a better projection to make for TIFs, given the recent changes proposed by the Board. He said that as they had mentioned earlier, the Board would reconsider these changes on May 20. He said that therefore, the best projection they had right now was approximately \$800,000 to \$900,000 coming from commercial entities.

Ms. Allen said that the \$7.5 million figure was not the entire amount they would need to take out, but rather \$800,000 of that. She said that to her understanding, when they received the refund from the commercial properties, the data centers were not expected to come online immediately, so they would not immediately receive the fees. She said that the second concern was related to occupancy. She said that she was seeking clarification on whether it was the issue of occupancy itself, or whether it was related to the permits they could start collecting through the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) program.

Mr. Counsell said that the Transportation Impact Fee was assessed at plan approval, but it was not collected until the permit was issued.

Ms. Allen asked where they were with the earliest data center project in terms of plan approval or permit issuance, in terms of their budget going into effect on July 1.

Mr. Counsell said that to provide additional context, two of the projects, totaling approximately 25 or 26 buildings, were being proffered out of the impact fees because they were making significant roadway improvements on their own. He said that there were a handful of other

proposed data center projects that did not fall into this category. He asked if Ms. Allen could repeat the second part of her question.

Ms. Allen asked, on July 1, which marks the beginning of their fiscal year and budget, which data centers would be eligible to reimburse the \$800,000 portion.

Mr. Counsell said that the two that he was certain of had already been permitted and would have already been assessed and paid their impact fees. He said that since they were currently in a period where the County was covering those costs, the County would include that in their transfer, as long as the relevant ordinances were in effect. He said that as of July 1, this situation may change.

Ms. Allen said that they did not have concrete information that confirmed they would collect back the total of \$800,000 from all the commercials, not just the data centers.

Mr. Counsell said that that was a projection, and it did not include the potential data centers. He said that he could obtain that information for the Board relatively quickly and return to the meeting later to provide it. He said that he needed to review some spreadsheets to determine the status of the other data centers, including their locations, whether they had been assessed and required to pay, and whether they were under permit to build the buildings. He said that if the County had already paid for the Transportation Fund, it would be covered during this fiscal year.

Ms. Allen said that it appeared they did not have concrete information at this time. She said that the \$800,000 was not only regarding the data centers.

Dr. Yeung said that her question was based on the 30% that required a public hearing. She asked if they were factoring that revenue into his calculations at the 30%. She said that she was confused because they were discussing this without it being voted on yet, and she was not sure why they were proceeding with it. She said that on top of that, the data centers required that they obtain permits and approvals through the planning and zoning process. She said that they had only grandfathered five of them, so what exactly was they were talking about in terms of revenue there? She said that she was having trouble understanding the context.

Mr. Diggs said that he wanted to be very careful with this conversation; he believed it required some sensitivity.

Ms. Gary said that to reiterate her point and question, she would like to revisit the discussion earlier, which she had expressed opposition to. She said that it was suggested that they could advertise at a higher rate, such as 30%, and then gather feedback from the public before setting a lower rate. She said that however, now that they were taking action with budget implications, she was concerned that they were setting a precedent that could lead to a cycle of escalating advertising rates.

Ms. Gary said that it was a matter of getting a foothold and then pushing for more, often without fully considering the financial implications. She said that she was not comfortable with this approach. She said that her question was, what would happen if they made this adjustment and

then the Board decided to revert to the original 10% rate, which they had discussed with legal in a closed session for an extended period? She said that she would like to know the implications of such a change. She asked, if they made the adjustment with the 30%, but then switched to a 10% rate, where would they be in terms of their budget?

Ms. Light said that at that point, the Board said that they would likely be evaluating transportation projects and determining which ones to delay or eliminate.

Mr. Diggs said that he believed they should discuss this item in a closed session at another time.

Ms. Vanuch said that she would like to clarify that these two options are mutually exclusive. She said that what they were calculating was the amount that the developers had budgeted. She said that taxpayers would be responsible for paying transportation impact fees, regardless of the percentage chosen. She said that this decision was made to ensure that they advertised both the data centers and the commercial projects coming online, thereby removing the need for taxpayers to offset those costs. She said that the percentage was irrelevant in this context, as it pertained to the developers' earmarked funds for the data centers, which were clearly communicated to them. She said that these two options were distinct and unrelated, and she would like to emphasize that.

Ms. Allen said that the actual cost was \$800,000, not \$7.5 million. She said that they were uncertain about when they would receive some of this funding, and as Ms. Light had pointed out, this may impact their existing transportation plans, which were contingent on receiving the funds by July 1. She said that they did have other projects that were contingent on these funds, and those funds would be reimbursed to them. She said that she was unclear as to why they were having this conversation, given that the details of the funding were still uncertain.

Ms. Bohmke said that she leaned over to their County Administrator to ask him to clarify these two parts of the discussion.

Mr. Ashton said that, after eight hours of discussing budgets and going back and forth, he thought they were essentially rehashing the same points. He said that he understood Ms. Vanuch's point, particularly regarding the revenue they would pay under the commercial TIF system, which they were phasing out for the new one. He said that they had not yet determined the rates for the new system, so they were uncertain about the revenue that would be generated.

Mr. Ashton said that Ms. Vanuch suggested pulling the current system out, freeing up approximately \$800,000, not \$7.5 million. He said that Ms. Light should correct him if he was wrong, but they needed to be mindful of the data center buildings' timeline. He said that their completion would depend on their progress, and if they were counting on them, they should consider the site plan completion date. He said that currently, they only had one site plan completed, and the Stafford Technology Campus was in the process, but it was excluded from this discussion due to a proffer.

Mr. Counsell said that it was the two in Centreport that were still eligible and required to pay impact fees.

Mr. Ashton said that it was a two-building complex in Centreport. He said that the other data centers were early in the pipeline, including Stafford Technology Campus, as they had recently finalized the water services agreement with them. He said that although they were currently in the process of evaluating this option, it was possible that the number may not materialize this year, but could become available in the following year. He said that from everyone's perspective, it seemed like they were all on the same page, but he thought they needed to be cautious and not get ahead of themselves.

Dr. Yeung said that she wanted to reiterate her questions. She asked if, regarding the \$800,000, there were any projects that required matching funds such as Smart Scale or similar initiatives? She said that she would appreciate a simple yes or no answer.

Mr. Counsell said yes.

Dr. Yeung said that when she mentioned the data center, he had suggested putting the conversation on hold. She said that they had grandfathered five projects, and they had included code in the planning and zoning process to ensure they would need to come before the Board. She said that, however, those were still in the planning and zoning phase, so they could not rely on any other than those already permitted.

Ms. Gary said that she was wondering if staff could provide a brief summary for the public regarding their discussion earlier in the work session. She asked if Ms. Light could reiterate for the public the amount the Board had cut from the budget during their earlier work session.

Ms. Light said that the Board reviewed the budget and identified \$4 million in potential savings. She said that a VPSA refunding credit of \$13,000, along with savings of \$78,000 to partner agencies, and removing \$2.2 million in funding for the jail, removing Christmas tree lighting funding in the amount of \$5,000, and this would also reduce their 3R allocation as expenditures decreased. She said that shifting the cost of Sheriff vehicles from ongoing to one-time expenses at \$800,000, and moving the general government pay raise from July 1 to January 1, would enable the Board to consider a tax rate reduction of \$0.0155 cents. She said that according to the proposed tax rate, it would be \$0.9281.

Dr. Yeung asked if the \$4 million was regarding the salary lapse.

Ms. Light said that there was an additional \$4 million in savings identified through the County Administrator's proposed budget. She said that this amount primarily resulted from salary lapse. She said that during the Board's work session today, an additional \$4 million in reductions were found.

Mr. Diggs said that the County Administrator initially proposed an \$0.08 tax rate increase, which was reduced to \$0.05 through his proposed reductions. He said that after further review, the Board made an additional \$0.015 in cuts.

Ms. Bohmke said that while they were discussing increases, although this would not affect the tax rate, and the Board may prefer to discuss this in the budget, she believed it was essential that

they inform the public about their current status with the Utilities Fund and their projected Utilities increase for this year and the next two years. She said that they were currently looking at a 6.5% increase.

Ms. Light said that for Fiscal Year 26, it was the third year of a three-year rate increase, which was 6.5%. She said that Utilities was currently working with their rate consultants to examine the next five years and present the findings to the Board as part of the five-year financial plan in the fall.

Ms. Bohmke said that her other question pertained to potential reductions for their operating budgets, as they had grown significantly, and they had explored various options for reductions. She said that she would like to revisit this topic with the Board, as she believed a reduction was another option worth considering.

Ms. Allen said that she had not been able to respond to that during the budget work session, but she wanted to share her thoughts. She said that one of the issues she had with a flat approach to departmental funding was that not every department was equal in size, scope, and task. She said that implementing a flat rate and reducing overhead across the board could have unintended consequences, particularly for smaller departments. She said that reducing overhead could lead to staff cuts, which would exacerbate existing staffing issues. She said that if they were cutting overhead, where would they make up for the lost revenue from smaller departments?

Ms. Allen said that she was particularly concerned about under-resourced departments that were already struggling to meet community needs. She said that for example, their Planning and Zoning Department received frequent feedback about the efficiency of their permitting and site plan processes, which generated significant commercial revenue. She said that if they cut their overhead, it could further delay projects, including the data centers, which were massive in scope.

Ms. Allen said that this department was responsible for overseeing site plans and permits, and their expertise was essential to managing these complex projects. She said that they were already outsourcing their work to an outside consultant, so cutting the overhead would exacerbate these major issues. She said that this was a department that would be the biggest generator of commercial revenue because of their oversight of all plans and permits. She said that it did not make sense to cut from the department and outsource the same job again. She said that the County Administrator had already addressed that in his recommended budget because he had not proposed any new positions.

Ms. Bohmke said that they did have new positions in the budget. She said that Planning and Zoning was held harmless in their budget discussions because the department was often self-sustaining within their budget process, as they generated revenue through permitting and fees. She said that therefore, she was not recommending reducing funding for Planning and Zoning, as they were all aware of the challenges in this area and had been contracting out services. She said that if the Board did not wish to use the current methodology, they could direct the County Administrator to establish a specific dollar amount and have him execute it within his

infrastructure. She said that the Board could then determine that amount. She said that she was not recommending a specific number.

Mr. English asked if Ms. Bohmke was suggesting a dollar amount for each department, except for Planning and Zoning.

Ms. Allen said that Planning and Zoning had always been a troublesome process because there were limited individuals who could pursue this type of work, and it was challenging to find such talent. She said that just because permits and fees generated revenue, they still needed to pay for overhead costs. She said that the revenue from permits and fees did not cover the entire department's expenses. She said that therefore, she did not think the Planning Department could be considered for any cuts.

Ms. Allen said that they could not simply sit here and play a game of whack-a-mole, where they said that Planning was untouched, while other departments, such as Finance, Transportation, Fire and Rescue, or Community Development, would be cut. She said that because they had a bird's eye view of the County Administrator's decisions and presentations, but they did not have a deep understanding of the day-to-day operations of each department. She said that they did not have insight into which departments were crucial to maintaining the level of service required for the community.

Ms. Allen said that she was not in a position to confidently say that one department was more important than the others. She said that each department relied on others, such as the County Attorney's Office, Transportation, Utilities, and Fire Rescue, to review and approve their work. She said that therefore, every department was interconnected, and it was impossible to prioritize one over the others without considering the broader implications.

Ms. Gary said that she did not support that proposal either. She said that in her opinion, it would require a significant amount of time and effort from the County Administrator. She said that she did not think it was fair to simply decide on an arbitrary number that worked for the Board's goals without considering the implications it would have on their staff. She said that they should have had these conversations well in advance if they were serious about pursuing this option. She said that instead, they were left with last-minute decisions that could have a negative impact on their organization. She said that she would not be supporting that proposal.

Dr. Yeung said that they had a significant number of veterans impacted by DOGE, ranging from 11,000 to 20,000. She said that this meant that the families of these veterans were also impacted. She said that earlier, when she mentioned not going into departments, she was emphasizing that these individuals had families that required care and support. She said that at this point, she had asked staff to look into utilizing salary lapse, and they were able to find \$4 million. She said that she was concerned that if they proceeded with departmental details now, they may be sending the wrong message.

Ms. Vanuch said that this was how organizations typically create budgets. She said that they had a board that sets a target number, and in their case, it was for the taxpayers. She said that one of the things she had worked with Ms. Bohmke on was reviewing their 2020 budget and analyzing

their expenditures. She said that when they adjusted the tax rate that year, they were able to identify areas where they could cut costs. She said that the operating budget Ms. Bohmke presented was an area where they could easily reduce expenses. She said that they were recommending a 7% reduction, which would result in a \$700,000 savings.

Ms. Vanuch said that this was essentially the expense account for the departments, and they were responsible for finding ways to reduce costs. She said that they told the County Administrator to meet with all departments and come up with a 7% reduction overall. She said that their County government should be able to find 7% in savings through renegotiating contracts and cutting spending. She said that they had been able to self-sustain during the pandemic and ensure a flat tax rate that year. She said that to achieve this, it simply required the will of the Board.

Mr. English said that he would suggest a 5% reduction.

Mr. Diggs said that he did not think they would be doing that. He said that he did not see support for that.

Dr. Yeung asked Mr. Ashton what the impacts would be on his department.

Mr. Ashton said that whoever said that it was not a small answer, that was true. He said that they had made multiple passes through these budgets, and he could assure the Board that they did not simply take what a department director submitted and approve it as-is. He said that they thoroughly reviewed and scrutinized every proposal to ensure that they were not overlooking any potential issues. He said that they had worked hard to eliminate any low-hanging fruit and easy targets, so those easy cuts were gone. He said that he was not saying that they were not capable of making it work; if the Board wanted them to, staff would do it.

Mr. Ashton said that however, he did have significant concerns about the scope of this initiative. He asked where it would extend to? He asked if they would be asking the Commissioner of Revenue to make similar adjustments to his budget, or would they be doing asking the Treasurer, Sheriff, and Constitutional Officers to make those cuts. He asked if they would only be focused on departments that he had direct control over. He said that if that was what the Board was asking him to do, that was a large burden on them because they were the ones they always went to.

Mr. Ashton said that he noticed this while watching the budget hearings last year before he came to the County and from looking at budgets in previous years. He said that it came back to the old saying, "the cobbler's children's shoes are the ones with holes in them." He said that the Administrator would go back to what he had direct control over. He said that he had deep concerns about the directive that the Board was considering, and he would like to understand the reasoning behind it.

Mr. Ashton said that someone had mentioned earlier that different departments had varying levels of personnel and operating expenditures, which may impact the feasibility of this initiative. He said that if they were starting to discuss personnel cuts, they would already have a budget in place, and they would need to find alternative solutions. He said that he was not trying

to be alarmist, but he knew that some smaller departments had limited operating room, making it a more difficult task. He said that they would do whatever the Board wanted, but he wanted to ensure that they were aware of the potential challenges and consequences.

Mr. Diggs said that he had listened to a lot of discussion, which he liked to do, because by the time his colleagues had all spoken, they had said everything that could be said. He said that he would like to share a few thoughts. He said that firstly, it appeared that the schools had become the scapegoat, following the veterans and unfunded mandates from the state. He said that in his opinion, the blame should lie with the Board of Supervisors, meaning the seven of them sitting there. He said that he did not care about his year of tenure on the board; the reality was that economic development had not met its potential.

Mr. Diggs said that when they discussed raising taxes, some of the citizens had mentioned it during their comments – the onus was on the Board to take responsibility and ensure accountability, not pointing the finger at different people in the community or different organizations within the community. He said that he was focusing on economic development, as it was the key issue. He said that when people came forward, to ask for no tax increase, but to also take care of the schools, he must clarify that the schools were part of the tax increase.

Mr. Diggs said that the School Board had requested approximately \$23 million in increased funding, while the County budget only allocated \$5 million. He said that this represented a significant increase, and they were forced to cut benefits and funding increase to the jail to make up for it. He said that these conversations were challenging, and making decisions was difficult. He had to cancel his Verizon service recently and used YouTube TV instead. He said that they were not immune to the decisions they made here, and they felt the impact just as much as anyone else.

Mr. Diggs said that when the Board said they were raising taxes, they were raising taxes on themselves, and they all had families and different struggles. He said that as they discussed these issues, he wanted to acknowledge the significant amount of work that had gone into this. He said that earlier, he had expressed his frustration with the way this year's process unfolded. He said that the Supervisors often waited until the last minute, and then they were left with last-minute decisions, whereas if they had worked harder over the last month, they might have achieved something more substantial rather than ramming through a short-term solution at the last minute.

Mr. Diggs said that he was a truth teller, and he did not operate under fear. He said that when they sent out messages meant to elicit fear or confusion, he had no patience for it. He said that he believed it was a horrible way to operate, and that was exactly what had happened here. He said that as one community, they needed to take care of each other, from the person with three kids who would struggle to the affluent individuals and everyone in between.

Mr. Diggs said that he hoped next year's conversations would be more productive, with a focus on working hard from the beginning to the end, rather than playing political games and scaring people. He said that it was ridiculous when they prioritized politics over people. He said that he felt that this was what had happened, and as a result, everyone would be upset – teachers, first responders, constituents, and even some of his Board colleagues. He said that Republicans,

Democrats, and everyone would be angry, and unfortunately, his face would be the one associated with it.

Mr. Diggs said that he took full responsibility for that. He said that if everyone was upset, it meant they had made the right decision and made it in a responsible manner. He said that no one was winning and this was not a budget that moved the County forward by leaps and bounds. He said that next year would be even more challenging; they were aware of that. He said that when they discussed kicking the can down the road, they could consider not increasing taxes and some people would be satisfied, but he questioned what would they do next year when it became even harder?

Mr. Diggs said that they could not use credit cards to solve their problems, even though some of them may be able to manage them in their personal budgets. He said that the bill would come due at 18.27%. He said that this was his thought process. He said that they were where they were. He said that he had made a promise to his constituents that he would not compromise the schools or their employees. He said that he believed that taking care of their employees would ultimately benefit their residents. He said that they were working to address their Planning and Zoning issues. He said that regarding economic development, he wanted to assure their constituents that Stafford had historically been seen as not business-friendly.

Mr. Diggs said that he saw on social media that people were criticizing them for letting the businesses do whatever they wanted and they should ask for more from those businesses, he must clarify that a lot of developers did not even want to be located in Stafford County. He said that the County Administrator, Community Development, and others had worked hard to change that perception, but they still had a lot of work to do. He said that he believed in calling it like it is. He said that they were trying to find a middle path that would allow their community to flourish while they waited for more economic development to arrive.

Ms. Allen said that she wanted to echo some of the sentiments the Chair had expressed. She said that when she first joined this Board, unfortunately, they were hindered by a pandemic, but they were in a better financial situation at the time. She said that they could go back and look at the meeting recordings; she had always been honest about her decision-making process and had consistently stated that raising taxes did not equate to fiscal irresponsibility.

Ms. Allen said that fiscal irresponsibility was about dishonesty and misrepresenting the facts. She said that Stafford County's problems did not begin with the seven of the current Supervisors. She said that at times, their decisions may have been exacerbated by this Board's actions. She said that however, this problem originated 30 years ago, when past Boards failed to raise taxes or implement smart economic development strategies solely to maintain low tax rates. She said that this approach ultimately led to the growth that they now complained about.

Ms. Allen said that she was not fabricating this information. She said that developers had told her that when she first took office. She asked why they could not develop their economy in a way that their counterparts to the north and Spotsylvania did. She said that one of the reasons was that they lacked square mileage compared to Spotsylvania. She said that however, when it came to the north, one of the reasons she was given was that they wanted to keep taxes low to attract

businesses, but once they arrived, they made it difficult for them to do business. She said that as a result, the County developed a reputation for being challenging to work with.

Ms. Allen said that some of the decisions made, which citizens tonight had referenced, included the Aquia Town Center and bowling alley, were beyond the Board's control. She said that as a Board, they had made efforts to incentivize businesses with tax breaks to make their County more attractive. She said that however, despite these efforts, businesses still had not come to them. She said that they even signed on to a project to help them attain VHA loans, but five years later, it remained unfulfilled. She said that therefore, they could only do so much to encourage businesses to come to their County.

Ms. Allen said that ultimately, if businesses made promises they could not keep, the County could not build it for them. She said that half the time, over the last couple of years, developers had cited COVID as the reason for failed business ventures, which had indeed changed the retail landscape and made it harder for certain business models to thrive. She said that when citizens came to the Board and said they were not doing enough to attract business, that was not accurate. She said that their Economic Development team was actively working to attract businesses.

Ms. Allen said that the way the growth had happened had not allowed for centrality around major arteries, such as the major roads around the County. She said that this had made it challenging for some businesses to find a viable location. She said that she recalled a conversation with Lidl, where she had asked why they could not put their business on Route 1 in her district, because it was easily accessible from Route 95 and Route 1. She said that they had responded that her rooftops, based on the data, were not centered in walkable areas, which tied back to their Transportation budget.

Ms. Allen said that to achieve walkability, they needed to build sidewalks. She said that in her district, Staffordboro was getting ready to be built, with one mile of sidewalks costing over a million dollars. She said that if one mile of sidewalk cost over \$1 million, and the County Transportation budget was only \$12 million, which included expanding roads, paving roads, and building new roads, how could they keep up with their infrastructure at a sufficient pace?

Ms. Allen said that the Utilities Fund, for example, was proposed to be 6% of the budget. She said that the 6% was a matter of public health. She asked if the residents wanted pipes to burst, or not have proper sewage. She said that a lot of their infrastructure for Utilities was old, and it was worth noting that data centers that were coming online were undertaking over \$60 million in infrastructure development to support them, so the County did not have to foot that bill. She said that there were consequences of unmanaged growth, which was a form of fiscal irresponsibility.

Ms. Allen said that when they chose not to raise taxes solely to avoid raising them, while ignoring the infrastructure and school needs, they were ignoring the fact that these issues did not start with the current Board. She said that the lack of new school construction, which had not occurred in over 20 years, was not a new problem. She said that they had been aware of the growth and had encouraged it, so it was reasonable to expect that they would plan accordingly. She said that now, the consequences of past inactions were becoming apparent over the next couple of years.

Ms. Allen said that she would not sit idly by and say that she would keep taxes flat, only to increase them later to cover basic needs. She said that that was fiscal irresponsibility. She said that she had warned the Board four years ago that keeping taxes flat would lead to significant increases, and now they were facing a multi-cent increase that would only continue to grow. She said that the County Administrator had worked incredibly hard to make it not \$0.08.

Ms. Allen said that the lack of action on this issue was not due to a lack of effort or failure to see the full picture, but rather because the public had been misled by a political narrative. She said that they had chosen to ignore the truth and instead listened to whatever placated them.

Ms. Allen motioned, seconded by Dr. Yeung, to approve Proposed Resolution R25-31 with a tax rate of \$0.9236.

Dr. Yeung said that they wanted smart growth and infrastructure, but it was challenging to achieve that when by-right development surrounded them, making it difficult to control. She said that when large homes were built, they often got rented out, leading to a high number of cars in the parking lot. She said that during their discussion on the tax rate, she had previously noted that the 2020 tax rate was \$0.97, followed by \$0.97 in 2021, \$0.85 cents in 2022, \$0.94 in 2023, \$0.94 in 2024, and \$0.90 in 2024. She said that she had been advocating for diversifying the tax base, as they continued to rely heavily on individual taxpayers.

Dr. Yeung said that many individuals in their community were not working, including those who had been impacted by the recent layoffs at Deloitte and Accenture. She said that she was not just speaking from experience, but also from what she had seen in the past and currently. She said that as someone who had had six-figure incomes, she was now working two adjunct professor jobs to make ends meet. She said that she had been a part of this community for over 31 years and had a deep appreciation for the Stafford County Schools and the dedicated teachers who cared for her children.

Dr. Yeung said that when some of them said that they came here and it was now crowded, that had been the trend since 1993. She said that as someone who had grown up in the community, she was deeply invested in its well-being. She said that she was committed to doing what was right, not just for the schools, but for individuals on fixed income as well. She said that she agreed that they would face challenges together until they got it right. She said that she believed it was crucial that they establish multiple revenue streams.

Dr. Yeung said that she had been advocating for a meal tax, which Senator Durant had planned to propose a 1% tax as well. She said that they could implement that now. She said that a transient tax could also be explored. She said that with this rate, they had already lowered it by \$0.02, which may seem small, but it would help alleviate some burden on citizens. She said that when data centers arrived, she hoped they could have a few to bring income without inundating the County with them. She said that she envisioned working with the EDA and local staff to bring in income-generating projects, such as movie theaters, and eateries.

Dr. Yeung said that by collaborating with the EDA and the Economic Development Office, they could advocate for them having enough rooftops to support these businesses. She said that she had noticed that many of these developments were concentrated on one side of town, while others were lacking. She said that she believed they could work together to address these issues, but they needed to be patient and work collaboratively. She said that she was not playing politics; she was committed to the community's success.

Mr. Diggs said that he wanted to ensure that he was accurately representing their discussion. He said that they had previously discussed reducing the tax real estate by \$0.02. He said that there was a conversation about the transient occupancy tax (TOT) and meal tax. He asked if they should include the meal tax discussion now or address it separately. He said that he wanted to make sure that they clearly outlined the cuts and the proposed increase in the meal tax, which was 1%, intended to fund the school's pay raises.

Ms. Light said that if there were any changes to the meals tax or transient occupancy tax, the Board must hold a public hearing on those. She said that if the Board provided staff with direction today to advertise the public hearing, they could schedule it for May 20. She said that the budget they would adopt today would not include any of those increases. She said that if the Board approved an increase of \$0.03 to the tax rate, they would reduce the rate by \$0.02 and bring that resolution back.

Ms. Allen asked what would happen with the May public hearing for transient occupancy and meals taxes.

Ms. Light said that the Board would conduct a public hearing, gather citizen comments and input, and make those decisions based on that information. She said that if the Board decided to increase the meals tax by 1% to reach 6%, which was the rate adopted by Spotsylvania, which was less than Fredericksburg's, and also increase transient occupancy, those changes could be implemented through budget amendments. She said that the Board could then direct the allocation of those funds. She said that it was possible that this could occur at the public hearing, and it would be implemented accordingly.

Ms. Vanuch motioned, seconded by Mr. English, to adopt a flat tax rate of \$0.8936.

Mr. English said that he wanted to clarify the reason he was supporting the proposal. He said that as a lifelong resident of this community, he had seen firsthand the impact of growth and development. He said that many of his neighbors, including his parents and grandparents, had reached out to him expressing concerns about affording the increase.

Mr. English said that a caregiver he spoke with today, who had been struggling to make ends meet, specifically asked him not to raise taxes. She said that her family was already struggling to pay for essential services like light bills. He said that as someone who had to balance the needs of the community with the need for funding, he understood the difficult decision they were facing.

Mr. English said that in his previous role on the Planning Commission, he had seen opportunities for economic development, such as the movie theaters on Route 610, go unrealized. He said that the County had supported economic development in many cases, but it never happened. He said that he did believe they needed to be cautious with their budget, especially given the uncertainty of the next six months to a year, so he was unable to support a tax increase at this time.

Ms. Bohmke asked if the substitute motion would include changes to the meals tax and the TOT, and how they projected the revenue from these taxes would be allocated.

Ms. Vanuch said that she believed that what they had discussed during today's work session was that if they could level the tax rate, both the real estate tax rate and the property tax rate, they could then have a discussion about the TOT and the meals tax at 1%, with that 1% being allocated to the schools. She said that this would allow the public to provide specific feedback on that funding and tax rate, which was more of a user tax rate rather than a tax on every single resident in the County. She said that she would like to see a flat tax on real estate.

Dr. Yeung asked what the amount of revenue those tax rates would bring in.

Ms. Light said that 2% on the Transient Occupancy Tax was \$1,093,000, and 1% of meals tax was approximately \$3.1 million.

Dr. Yeung said that at this point in time, the schools were experiencing a \$1.5 million increase, while the County was at a \$2.7 million increase. She said that she believed that with the current amount, it may be challenging for them to reach the minimum \$1.5 million required to receive matching funds.

Mr. Ashton said that according to what Mr. Fulmer stated during their meeting earlier today, the \$5 million in the budget proposal that he had submitted to the Board a few weeks ago included the \$1.5 million. He said that going beyond that amount was not included in the proposal.

Dr. Yeung said that as a result, they lost the state funding.

Ms. Vanuch said that she wanted to make a comment regarding their review of the school budget. She said that it was surprising how easily they overlooked the fact that the schools had \$6 million in carryover funds this year. She said that this meant that, technically, they had overfunded them by \$6 million the previous year. She said that as a result, that amount could essentially offset the additional \$5 million they needed. She said that this highlighted the need for hard decisions and a thorough examination of their budget. She said that she was aware that the Board may dislike percentages, but they provided a clear picture.

Ms. Vanuch said that the school budget had increased by over 56% since 2021, primarily due to the state transfer, and by 33% due to their local transfer, as shown on the Q&A session on the public portal. She said that the numbers for teacher pay raises, support, and bus driver salaries were also available on the portal, with all of these increases in the double-digit range. She said that if they were not careful with this budget, they risked being in a difficult situation next year, where the real estate market had declined due to federal worker layoffs and subsequent home

sales. She said that this could lead to a market crash in Stafford, negatively impacting their assessments next year. She said that as a result, they may need to consider tax rates as high as \$1.30 or \$1.40 to break even, assuming this scenario unfolded.

Mr. Diggs said that he did not believe that President Trump would allow that to occur.

Ms. Vanuch said that she believed they were overly reliant on federal government workers, as they had historically been exempt from the impacts of recessions. She said that when the federal government shut down, they had seen the effects. She said that what was concerning was that they would be in a difficult situation next year, halfway through the budget cycle, where they would have to lay off staff due to a lack of funds. She said that they would have to inform schools that they owed them \$50 million and could not pay, as they would not have the necessary funds in their budget. She said that this was a real scenario they were facing, and they needed to take all possible measures to prevent it from happening.

Ms. Vanuch said that their County's operating budget in 2021 was \$134 million, and the proposed budget for 2025 was \$205 million. She said that there were certainly things they could cut to address this issue. She said that it was surprising that they continued to consider adding more funding to the budget, as they had discussed in their work session today. She said that specifically, she would like to know if the proposed market pay position, which would result in pay raises of \$10,000 to \$20,000 for \$500,000, was still included in the resolution being voted on.

Mr. Diggs said that he believed that there were several key points that needed to be addressed regarding this matter. He said that given that they had not had a chance to hear everyone's plan until today, which was last-minute, he thought it was essential to consider the broader implications. He said that when discussing the schools and the proposed increases, he would like to know how long the schools had been underfunded and without the accurate pay scale or rate they were supposed to receive.

Mr. Diggs said that he would like to know how long they had gone without the necessary funding. He said that he had noticed that they had been saying they had taken care of their employees in the past, but he would like to see a clearer picture of the situation. He said that they had gone from an employer's market to an employee's market, and they may be reverting back to the former. He said that they were addressing the deficit and the hole they had found themselves in. He said that although he was not present for all of this, it appeared to him that they were making progress.

Mr. Diggs said that his stance on this issue was not influenced by his affiliation with the Sheriff's Office; they had not even begun to discuss first responders' pay. He said that he was standing by his position because he believed it was essential to recognize that government employees, including those in Stafford, deserved fair compensation. He said that they worked hard and contributed significantly to their community. He said that he had spoken to employees in other government agencies, and they did not have to endure the same level of demands as Stafford's employees. He said that when it came to market pay, he was not willing to compromise on a 2.75% increase for their employees.

Mr. Diggs also said that the schools should be matched with a similar increase. He said for example, Spotsylvania County was offering a 5% increase, and they were already losing employees to the north and south of them. He said that they needed to make an effort to demonstrate to their employees that they were striving to do their best while also addressing the challenges faced by those in the community. He said that they could not use the community's needs as an excuse to avoid making difficult decisions. He said that he was not suggesting that they cut from the \$5 million; rather, he was committed to finding alternative solutions that would not harm their employees or compromise the funding for their schools.

Ms. Vanuch said that the main point she wanted to make about the \$6 million in carryover funds was that it could potentially augment the \$5 million increase. She said that if they needed the additional amount, she believed Mr. Fulmer had mentioned it was around \$3.5 million or \$3.1 million for the meals tax and TOT. She said that she did not understand why it needed to be \$5 million. She said that she found it puzzling that they were now discussing reducing the real estate tax rate by \$0.015, while simultaneously planning to advertise two other taxes to increase.

Ms. Vanuch said that it was astonishing to her that they could not simply level out the tax rate. She said that she had requested a line-by-line budget, but the schools refused to provide it, flat-out refusing to share the details of how the money was being spent. She said that all she received was the online portal, which only showed categorical funding. She said that without a line-item budget, it was impossible to know exactly how the funds were being allocated. She said that the increases were substantial, and she had witnessed firsthand the financial burden it placed on residents.

Ms. Vanuch said that her School Board member acknowledged that making tough decisions was necessary, but ultimately, they would have to work with what they were given. She said that they were investing over \$300 million in new schools, which was a significant investment. She said that however, the tax burden was becoming unsustainable, and she firmly believed they must make harder decisions to reduce the tax rate and avoid further real estate tax increases, which were forcing people out of their homes.

Ms. Vanuch said that the real estate tax was one expense that residents could not avoid, and it was imperative that they find a solution that did not impact this tax. She said that exploring alternatives to the TOT and meals taxes could be a viable solution, as long as it did not compromise their goal of not raising real estate taxes this year.

Mr. Diggs said that he was willing to work with his colleagues to review the items they would like to cut. He said that they could go through the list and identify areas where they could make adjustments. He said that he was open to discussing further, but he wanted to clarify that not paying their bills was not an option. He said that the jail was within their own community, and he believed it was a benefit to their greater community, as people from King George, Spotsylvania, and other surrounding areas came there for services.

Mr. Diggs said that he had spoken to friends who worked there, and he was concerned that if they were to reduce funding, it would have a significant impact on the community. He said that

they could not set a precedent by not paying their bills, especially when they were making decisions that affected their constituents. He said that they had made some poor decisions in the past decade, and it was time for them to take responsibility and make things right.

Mr. Diggs said that he was willing to work with his fellow Supervisors to identify areas where they could make cuts, but he needed to know where they were going to start. He said that they had already reduced the tax rate from \$0.05, and the other two items were essential needs, not wants. He said that the top item was for hotels, which was tied to the meals tax when people dined out. He said that he was willing to make further cuts, but he needed to know where they were going to cut back.

Ms. Allen said that for the public's benefit, she wanted to clarify that she had three jobs and did not want to be at this meeting extremely late. She said that she strongly disagreed with the dire predictions and long-term assumptions that often accompanied their discussions. She said that these hypothetical scenarios and endless debates could be frustrating, and they frequently said one thing, only to change their minds the following year. She said that it was like they were living in a perpetual state of uncertainty, and she did not think that was a productive way to approach their work.

Ms. Allen said that since they were unable to know those things for certain, she did not subscribe to the idea that they should never increase taxes. She said that this approach was illogical. She said that as it related to her support for the transient occupancy tax increase, which was 2%, was because Stafford County excelled in areas such as Parks and Recreation, as well as Tourism and sports. She said that they attracted visitors from outside the County, including residents of Stafford who participated in tournaments and events. She said that additionally, when people commuted to Quantico for workshops and conferences, they often stayed in local hotels, generating revenue for the County from non-residents.

Ms. Allen said that the meals tax was another opportunity for them to capture revenue. She said that she recalled a conversation with a Panera employee in her district, who told her that their location was the busiest on the east coast due to its location, and that was not solely due to local residents. She said that by implementing these measures, they could generate revenue from non-residents. She said that she would like to ask a question regarding the School Board's involvement in this matter. She asked if the School District's Chief Financial Officer to answer the question about their carryover funds.

Ms. Allen said that in the past, the schools had requested the Board to utilize their carryover funds for specific items, including emergencies. She asked if they were to instruct the School Board to use their funds to cover the \$5 million, where would they be budgeting and appropriating funds in the event of emergencies?

Chris Fulmer, Chief Financial Officer for Stafford County Public Schools, said that as per the County policy, they typically targeted one-time expenditures. He said that therefore, they did not target recurring expenditures with their carryover funds. He said that occasionally, they would purchase additional buses because they did not have sufficient funds in their recurring operating budget. He said that this was part of their tentative plan for this year. He said that if available

funds were available, they would like to purchase additional buses to increase their fleet from 12 to 20.

Mr. Fulmer said that historically, they had targeted this number for buses, as well as other one-time expenditures. He said that regarding their carryover from FY24, approximately \$3 million of that was additional state and federal funding that arrived after the fiscal year. He said that they also had \$2.5 million in additional sales tax revenue. He said that during the school year, they initially anticipated lower sales tax revenue, which led them to cut their expenditures. He said that however, the state's revenue ended up being higher than expected, resulting in a \$4 million swing, which contributed to some of the savings. He said that as a result, they were able to cut back on their expenditures, and the revenue ultimately exceeded their expectations.

Ms. Allen said that to recap, they initially under-budgeted for school sites because they had anticipated lower state funding. She said that instead, the state did not experience the anticipated downturn, resulting in additional funds being allocated towards one-time projects. She said that as they had learned from last year and were still learning this year, it was essential to avoid using one-time funding for salaries. She asked if the \$5 million increase was mostly for salaries.

Mr. Fulmer said that that was correct.

Mr. English asked Mr. Fulmer to clarify the plan for the \$6 million.

Mr. Fulmer said that the current \$6 million from FY24 was projected to be used in two main areas. He said that \$3.1 million would be spent on technology upgrades, including replacing Chromebooks for their students and providing classroom equipment, such as desktop computers and Chromebooks for their teachers. He said that \$2.9 million would be used to purchase a warehouse, which was expected to result in annual savings of \$125,000 to \$200,000 in their budget.

Mr. English said that he understood the logic of buying the building to save money, but it could result in another 3R project in ten years. He said that he had previously expressed concern about buying a building when they could just rent one and depend on the landlord to fix the problems they had.

Ms. Gary said that she would not be supporting the substitute motion, with her reasoning based on discussions the Board had already had during their earlier work session. She said that during their work session, the Supervisors had discussed many potential cuts and had only been able to agree on those that resulted in the prior motion's decrease of \$0.02. She said that the other items that would be cut to provide a flat tax rate were items that the majority of the Board had determined to be essential and should not be eliminated from the FY26 budget. She said that these included all of their community agencies that served their citizens and alleviated pressures on the government to provide those services and contributed to the overall wellbeing of the County.

Ms. Gary motioned to call the question on the substitute motion to adopt a flat real estate tax rate of \$0.8936.

The Voting Board tally was:

Yea: (3) Allen, Gary, Yeung

No: (4) Bohmke, Diggs, English, Vanuch

Dr. Yeung said that she did have a conversation with the School District about the \$6 million in carryover funds, and she was not supportive of using the \$3 million for little kids to have computers at home. She said that the School District had the autonomy to use the money as they saw fit, but they must request the appropriation from the Board of Supervisors. She asked Mr. Fulmer if there were any other 3R list items that the funds could be spent on as a one-time purchase.

Mr. Fulmer said that they had unlimited options to pull from 3R lists to use one-time funding on.

Dr. Yeung said that she believed that although it may not help this year, using that funding for a 3R item could help in 2026.

Mr. Diggs called the vote on the substitute motion to pass a flat tax rate of \$0.8936.

The Voting Board tally was:

Yea: (3) Bohmke, English, Vanuch

No: (4) Allen, Diggs, Gary, Yeung

Ms. Bohmke said that she had concerns about the original motion, which did not include some of the cuts the Board had agreed to during their earlier work session. She said that she did not believe it was appropriate to blame the past Boards for their current situation, because those Boards had made the best decisions possible with the information available at the time, and based on staff recommendations. She said that she did wish, in retrospect, that they had downzoned and increased the acreage on by-right zoning in order to slow the residential growth of the County. She said that it was essential to acknowledge that this all related to decisions around land use in the County. She said that it was the Board's job to negotiate with staff to determine where they could cut from the budget, and she wanted to assure the public that they certainly had had those conversations.

Mr. Diggs said that he believed in transparency and open communication, and he was willing to have a conversation about any additional cuts before they voted. He said that he wanted to ensure that everyone had a chance to participate and that they did not shut down the process without proper discussion.

Ms. Vanuch asked if Mr. Diggs could review the line items that would be cut from the recommended budget with the proposed tax rate.

Ms. Light said that to summarize, the VPSA refunding resulted in a reduction of \$13,854. She said that there were reductions to FRA and EDA, which totaled \$18,411 and \$60,000, respectively. She said that the Managed Vacancy Savings account was reduced by another \$100,000. She said that a reduction of \$5,000 for the Christmas tree lighting was also part of this

reduction. She said that as part of their efforts to reduce expenditures, 3R was 3% of ongoing operating revenues, so that would be reduced by \$117,938. She said that then, they were shifting the Sheriff ongoing vehicle expenses to one-time expenses, which amounted to \$800,000.

Ms. Vanuch said that they had previously discussed eliminating the pay increases to the jail, which was \$2.2 million, and the pay raise for County government, which had been discussed to be funded at the half-year mark, but now was being considered for the full year.

Mr. Diggs said that there was consensus from the Board to move the salary increases to mid-year.

Ms. Vanuch asked if there would be a tax relief reduction based on this new rate.

Ms. Light said that it would be \$112,000. She said that she would be including this in the revenue for that tax change. She said that she had included the \$200,000 increase for the jail.

Ms. Vanuch asked if adding in the \$775,000 and the \$2 million to the jails changed the tax rate for the original motion.

Ms. Light said that if the Board were to adjust the tax rate, they had not discussed transient occupancy or meals tax, which may be revisited. She said that she had also included a provision to move the current 2% transient occupancy tax, which supported capital projects, specifically for parks, from the capital projects fund to the General Fund. She said that this would allow the Board to potentially increase the transient occupancy tax by an additional 2% and allocate those funds to support park projects.

Mr. Diggs said that they would reduce the tax rate, but it would allow them to backfill the 2% with the money for the Parks and Recreation budget.

Ms. Gary said that to clarify, they had a 2% transient occupancy tax allocated to Parks and Recreation for stays less than 30 days at hotels, accommodations, and other establishments. She said that the Board would allocate this amount to the General Fund, but they planned to move it back to Parks and Recreation once the TOT rate was increased by another 2%. She said that this would ensure that the projects funded by the Parks and Recreation department continued to receive the necessary funding. She said that it was important that everyone was on the same page regarding this plan, which involved moving the tax revenue between the General Fund and Parks and Recreation.

Ms. Bohmke said that she would like to clarify a point based on their previous year's budget discussions. She said that they had previously committed to doing Carl Lewis this year, and she believed that commitment remained in place regardless of any changes.

Ms. Vanuch asked Ms. Light if the reductions could further reduce the tax rate.

Ms. Light said that with the \$2.7 million in additional savings, the Board could reduce the rate by an additional penny. She said that part of the plan was to balance the budget in the future with

the meals tax. She said that a 1% increase in the meals tax would provide \$3.1 million, so the Board still had to reduce \$373,000 in the budget to reduce the tax rate to \$0.9236.

RECESS

The Board recessed at 11:11 p.m. and reconvened at 11:48 p.m.

Mr. English motioned, seconded by Ms. Allen, to continue the meeting after 12:00 a.m..

The Voting Board tally was:

Yea: (7) Allen, Bohmke, Diggs, English, Gary, Vanuch, Yeung

No: (0)

Ms. Light said that the proposed tax rate was \$0.9236, a \$0.03 increase from the FY24 adopted rate and a \$0.02 from the County Administrator's recommended budget and the advertised rate. She said that there was a shift of \$1 million in transient occupancy from the capital projects fund to the General Fund. She said that the tax relief has been reduced by \$112,000 due to the rate decrease. She said that these were the changes to revenues.

Ms. Light said that next, she would review the changes to expenditures. She said that the PSA refunding credits amount to \$13,854. She said that there was a reduction in funding for the Fredericksburg Regional Alliance by \$18,000. She said that the Economic Development Authority's request has been eliminated, saving \$60,000. She said that the General Government Adjustment has been moved from July 1 to January 1, resulted in a reduction of \$775,472.

Ms. Light said that the Christmas tree lighting event has been reduced by \$5,000. She said that the 3R expenses had been reduced, resulting in a policy requirement reduction of \$117,938. She said that additional vacancy savings had been created, reducing expenditures by an additional \$100,000. She said that the Sheriff's ongoing funding for vehicles to one-time funding resulted in a reduction of \$800,000. She said that at the proposed tax rate, there were \$2.3 million in expenses exceeding revenue. She said that this did not include any potential reductions to the jail, which was a significant topic of discussion prior to the break.

Ms. Light said that there was a \$2.3 million expenditure shortfall that needed to be addressed either by reducing costs or finding an additional \$2.3 million in revenue. She said that the Board may want to consider the meals tax. She said that it could not be approved today, as it required a public hearing. She said that they could revisit this on May 20, 2025. She said that one way to fund the gap was to increase the percentage to provide \$2.3 million in revenues. She said that they could also consider changing the tax rate from \$0.9236. She said that if they raised it by \$0.007, they would be close to closing hat gap.

Ms. Gary asked what the meals tax would need to be to close the gap.

Ms. Light said that it would have to be 0.7%.

Ms. Gary said that the meals tax was going to increase by 1%, which is equivalent to \$3.1 million. She said that that was the maximum, so they could not take it any further. She asked about the TOT.

Ms. Light said that there was no cap on transient occupancy, and it was currently at 9%.

Ms. Gary asked what would be necessary in order to maintain the jail funding.

Ms. Light said that it would require a 4% increase.

Dr. Yeung asked how much would need to be cut if they raised the TOT by 1.5%.

Ms. Light said that it would require cuts of \$2.5 million.

Ms. Allen said that the problem with the jail was that the proposed increase was \$2.2 million, which was a significant amount. She said that the issue with that was that even if they wanted to cut the contract, they would still be responsible for paying the difference. She said that according to her understanding, the jail would invoice them for the additional amount, regardless of whether they cut the contract or not. She said that therefore, she was not sure how they could avoid paying their bill if the jails were going to add the difference to the invoice.

Ms. Vanuch said that they could communicate with their partner localities, including King George, Fredericksburg, and Spotsylvania. She said that in order for the jail to sue the County, the jail board would have to vote to do so, and she sincerely doubted they would do so.

Ms. Allen said that she was concerned they would just invoice the County anyway, rather than suing.

Ms. Vanuch said that the jail board would have to amend the jail budget. She said that they had to give the other localities notice that they would not be funding the jail.

Ms. Allen said that as a Board, they must take responsibility with the outcomes of not funding the jail and potentially being charged for it without it being accounted for in their own budget.

Mr. Diggs said that they must consider that their other partner localities would be funding the jail.

Ms. Vanuch said that she was unsure if those localities had already voted on the jail budget.

Ms. Bohmke said that she believed that Spotsylvania had voted to keep the jail funding in their budget, but they did not necessarily choose to appropriate the funding.

Mr. Diggs asked if Ms. McClendon could clarify funding of the jail invoice.

Rysheda McClendon, County Attorney, said that staff had reviewed the agreement that had been referenced, and as it was a contract, staff advised the Board that there would be contractual issues with nonpayment of invoices.

Ms. Allen said that she would be comfortable moving forward, understanding that they would discuss the issue with the jail board and that they may have to pay the invoice.

Ms. Gary said that she was sure they could come up with a plan, but the Chair should immediately reach out to their partner localities to communicate the appropriations to the jail.

Ms. Vanuch said that Mr. Ashton needed to contact the other County Administrators. She said that she could then discuss it with the jail board.

She said that this meant that there would be no increase at all, according to what had been previously discussed, specifically the \$200,000 figure.

Mr. Diggs said that he was wondering if flat-funding the jail would include the 2.75% salary increases for employees.

Ms. Vanuch said that they would not have an answer to that until the jail board reconvened a meeting, because it depended on what the other localities did. She said that other counties could potentially fund the increase while Stafford did not. She said that they must meet with the other locality representatives before having that answer.

Ms. Light said that the jails considered the bailiff's compensation for all jurisdictions they supported, including King George, the cities, Spotsylvania, and Stafford. She said that they aimed to find the median or average compensation as they navigated the budgeting process to ensure that their bailiff and correctional officers were at the median or average of the bailiff's compensation. She said that this was based on the prior year's data, so if a jurisdiction, such as Spotsylvania, raised its bailiff's salary, it would impact the jail's number.

Ms. Light said that overall, there was a \$4.2 million increase from all jurisdictions, including debt service and operating costs. She said that Stafford's share was \$2.2 million, which was primarily driven by the jail's population. She said that the cost increase was also driven by the 9.68% raise for uniformed staff and 5% raise for non-uniformed staff.

Dr. Yeung said that the County staff was receiving a 2.75% raise. She asked if they only provided the jail with a 2.75% raise, how much that would reduce the \$2.2 million increase.

Mr. Diggs asked if that reduction would have an impact on the County's tax rate.

Ms. Vanuch said that if they were to reduce their transfer by \$50 million, it could potentially impact the makeup of the partnership and the regional participation. She said that this was the challenge they faced with the involvement of multiple partner agencies, as it made them reliant on others. She said that during the COVID-19 pandemic, they recognized the importance of

being in lockstep with all partners. She said that unfortunately, this was an ongoing issue, as they saw different challenges arise each year.

Ms. Allen said that she understood the Chair's concern about taking care of their jail employees to maintain equity with County staff, but she did not feel comfortable to earmark meals tax revenues to fund the jail employee pay increases when they had previously discussed doing so for their schools. She said that she would prefer to allocate it to their schools and employees, as they comprised a larger percentage of their community. She said that the approach seemed more justifiable, as it would have a greater impact on their community, particularly the 71% who resided there. She said that she was not suggesting that the jail employees did not, but rather that the \$3 million would have a more far-reaching impact on their community than allocating it to the jails.

Mr. Diggs said that he felt that the jail employees deserved a pay increase due to the difficulty of their jobs. He said that he knew that he could never work in the jail due to the stress of the job, and they were currently facing staffing issues in general. He said that he understood the Vice Chair's point, but he did not think that a reduced raise would be received well by those employees.

Ms. Gary said that it was unfortunate they were weighing their options for funding jails and schools. She said that she felt that funding education was the more prudent approach, and she felt that Ms. Vanuch would be very successful as she had been in the past with finding a practical budget with the jail. She said that she felt confident they could find an amicable path forward for the region.

Mr. Diggs said that there was Board consensus to level-fund the jail with \$200,000.

Ms. Light said that currently, they had a \$344,959 funding gap. She said that this did not consider any additional meals tax the Board may change in May, and did include shifting the TOT from capital projects for parks to the General Fund.

Ms. Bohmke said that one potential solution was to direct the County Administrator to identify the necessary funds within the budget.

Mr. Diggs called the vote to adopt a real estate tax rate of \$0.9236.

The Voting Board tally was:

Yea: (4) Allen, Diggs, Gary, Yeung

No: (3) Bohmke, English, Vanuch

Ms. Allen motioned, seconded by Ms. Gary, to authorize the County Administrator to advertise a public hearing for a proposed 1% meals tax increase and a 2% transient occupancy tax increase.

The Voting Board tally was:

Yea: (5) Allen, Bohmke, Diggs, Gary, Yeung

No: (2) English, Vanuch

PUBLIC HEARINGS

ITEM 8. BUDGET AND MANAGEMENT; PUBLIC HEARING ON FY2026-35 CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (CIP) AND FY2026 VIRGINIA PUBLIC SCHOOL AUTHORITY (VPSA) BOND ISSUANCE; PROPOSED RESOLUTION R25-30 (CIP); PROPOSED RESOLUTION R25-32 (VPSA)

Andrea Light, Chief Financial Officer, said that their proposed 10-year CIP was estimated to cost approximately \$1.4 billion. She said that Ms. Krauss was currently distributing 3R funding, which included some changes the Board requested. She said that they discussed these changes earlier, specifically regarding the Stafford High School press box. She said that as a result, those changes were now reflected in the 3R costs. She said that this would be the Stafford High School press box, with concession funding coming from both proffers and the County's 3R funding.

Ms. Light said that they had reduced the Pratt Park parking lots funding to the remaining 3R funding, which was about \$250,000. She said that this was insufficient to complete a parking lot, but it could be held for future use. She said that Utilities had a 10-year CIP, with an estimated cost of \$759 million. She said that the next public hearing the Board would consider was the VPSA public hearing. She said that the Virginia Public School Authority was the primary authority they use to borrow debt for schools. She said that voting on this did not obligate the Board to issue debt or issue debt up to the \$180 million, which was their anticipated amount.

Mr. Diggs opened the public hearing on the CIP and VPSA funds. Seeing no speakers, he closed the public hearing and the matters rested with the Board.

Mr. English motioned, seconded by Ms. Gary, to approve Proposed Resolution R25-30.

The Voting Board tally was:

Yea: (7) Allen, Bohmke, Diggs, English, Gary, Vanuch, Yeung

No: (0)

Ms. Bohmke motioned, seconded by Ms. Allen, to approve Proposed resolution R25-32.

The Voting Board tally was:

Yea: (7) Allen, Bohmke, Diggs, English, Gary, Vanuch, Yeung

No: (0)

RECESS

The Board recessed at 12:31 a.m. and reconvened at 12:51 a.m.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

ITEM 9. BUDGET AND MANAGEMENT; CONSIDER ADOPTING AND APPROPRIATING THE FISCAL YEAR 2026 BUDGET; PROPOSED RESOLUTION R25-27 (ADOPT BUDGET); PROPOSED RESOLUTION R25-28 (APPROPRIATE BUDGET)

Andrea Light, Chief Financial Officer, said that before the Board was a resolution that incorporated all the changes the Board has made. She said that this resolution included reducing the transfer to debt service for the VPSA refunding credit, reducing the Fredericksburg Regional Alliance, and reducing the general government adjustment, which would be seen across all departments. She said that it also removed the jail funding of \$1.9 million, leaving an increase of \$200,000. She said that the Economic Development Authority would receive a reduction of \$60,000. She said that they had put \$344,959, which Mr. Ashton would determine where to apply, as a non-departmental reduction for this budget presentation.

Ms. Light said that they anticipated that these reductions would be specified in the future. She said that the resolution also included a reduction to their for 3R of \$117,938, as well as additional vacancy savings of \$100,000. She said that also, the Sheriff would shift from ongoing expenses for vehicles to one-time expenses of approximately \$800,000. She said that currently, staff was printing the R25-28 appropriation resolution, which would accompany this document. She said that the main difference between the budget and the appropriation is that the appropriation includes a 5% holdback, excluding debt service and partner agencies. She said that this 5% holdback was applied to all general government departments and the schools transfer, as per their financial policies. She said that this conservative approach allowed them to review their tax revenue as it comes in next December, ensuring it aligned with the budget.

Ms. Light said that the appropriation resolution included a 5% hold on General Fund, including the school operating transfer. She said that they did not hold the entire amount, but rather reserved 5% to be conservative and allowed them to review revenues generated through tax billing in December. She said that the remaining amount provided authorization to spend.

Ms. Allen motioned, seconded by Ms. Gary, to approve Proposed Resolution R25-27.

The Voting Board tally was:

Yea: (5) Allen, Bohmke, Diggs, Gary, Yeung

No: (2) English, Vanuch

Ms. Gary motioned, seconded by Ms. Allen, to approve Proposed Resolution R25-28.

The Voting Board tally was:

Yea: (5) Allen, Bohmke, Diggs, Gary, Yeung

No: (2) English, Vanuch

REPORTS BY BOARD MEMBERS

Ms. Bohmke said that she wanted to express her condolences to the family who lost their daughter in the tragic accident that occurred in their backyard. She said that although she did not know them personally, she could not help but feel a sense of sadness and shock when she heard

the news. She said that it was heartbreaking to think that a child's life was cut short in such a way, and it was a painful reminder of the fragility of life. She said that her thoughts were with the family during this difficult time.

Mr. English said that he had no reports at this time.

Ms. Gary said that they had recently experienced a recent loss of a young child, as well as another at a high school.. She said that she found it difficult to process the loss of a child. She said that tonight, they had acknowledged this moment to remind everyone that they had been through thorough work to continue to prioritize people, be gracious with one another, and kind. She said that she never knew what others were going through, regardless of age. She said that she did not want to be too solemn, but she thought they should take a moment to reflect on what they had accomplished tonight. She said that she believed that what they had achieved, despite the challenges, was a testament to their ability to find a way forward, work together, and take care of their people.

Ms. Vanuch said that she had no reports at this time.

Dr. Yeung said that she had no reports at this time.

Ms. Allen said that she would like to take a moment to express her gratitude to Ms. Light and her staff, as well as Ms. Krauss and her team, for their hard work in putting together the budget. She said that she also wanted to acknowledge the efforts of the community engagement team and everyone who played a role in this process. She said that while Mr. Ashton may receive recognition for his involvement, it was clear that the true backbone of this effort was the Finance Department and the individuals who had worked tirelessly behind the scenes.

Ms. Allen said that she had the pleasure of working with Ms. Light's team, and she could attest to their exceptional dedication and professionalism. She said that she appreciated the patience and understanding they had shown throughout this process. She said that she would also like to extend her thanks to the County Attorney and her team for their crucial role in ensuring the budget was prepared in compliance with all relevant laws and regulations. She said that it was never an easy task, and she appreciated the dedication and expertise that had gone into making this process a success.

Ms. Allen said that she would also like to take a moment to acknowledge her own emotions and reactions during this discussion. She said that while she may have let her feelings get the better of her, she apologized to Ms. Vanuch for any unprofessional language or tone that may have been used. She said that she had strived to maintain a level of decorum, even in difficult conversations, and she appreciated the opportunity to reflect on her behavior and make amends.

Mr. Diggs said that he wanted to echo some of the sentiments expressed. He said that he wanted to extend his gratitude to the community for taking the time to attend tonight's meeting. He said that he appreciated those who had remained to listen and engage in the discussion. He said that regardless of whether they had been in favor of the tax increase or had concerns about Buc-ee's, he valued the time they had taken to come down and share their thoughts. He said that he also

wanted to thank the staff for their hard work and dedication. He said that he was grateful for the 24/7 availability and the efforts they put in, even on weekends.

Mr. Diggs said that often, the public may not have seen the behind-the-scenes work that went into this role. He said that he appreciated the access he had to staff and the ability to respond to concerns in a timely manner. He said that he also wanted to thank his colleagues for their understanding and support. He said that they may have had different perspectives, but their shared goal was to get things done and move the needle. He said that he acknowledged that he may not always be right, and he appreciated the guidance and experience of his colleagues. He said that they helped him navigate the complexities of this role and provided a different lens to consider. He said that he was committed to working collaboratively and appreciated their patience and understanding.

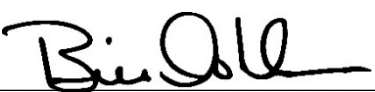
Mr. Diggs said that he also wanted to take a moment to acknowledge the Hash family, who had lost their eight-year-old daughter in a tragic accident involving a tree swing. He said that he wanted to express his deepest condolences to them and recognize the impact of this loss on the community. He said that he had spent time with the family after the event and had asked if it was okay for him to share their story with the community tonight. He said that they would have celebrated their daughter's ninth birthday on May 6. He said that her favorite colors were blue and purple, and she loved the character Stitch. He said that she had attended Grafton Elementary School.

Mr. Diggs said that what struck him was that no matter who entered their home, she had to give them a hug before they left. He said that if she did not get to give someone a hug, she would cry. He said that her family described her as so sweet and loving. He said that to celebrate her birthday, they organized a meal train and a fundraiser. She said that they laid her to rest this past Sunday, but to celebrate her birthday and to celebrate her life, they planned to rent out a movie theater to screen the Lilo and Stitch film, inviting her friends.

Mr. Diggs said that it put into perspective what truly mattered in life. He said that as he reflected on it, he was reminded of the importance of never letting anger or frustration build up, and instead, addressing it today. He said that the community's response to the Hash family's loss was a testament to their values. He said that the overwhelming support and generosity they received was a reflection of the community's spirit. He said that he was proud to be a part of this community. He said that as they moved forward, he believed they were all working towards making Stafford a better place.

ADJOURNMENT

The Board adjourned its meeting at 1:08 a.m.



William H. Ashton, II
County Administrator

Public Comment Form

COMPLETE

#126

CREATED



PUBLIC

Apr 4th 2025, 4:59:47 pm

IP ADDRESS



108.28.154.166

* Name

Ignacio Esteban

* Address

10 Dallhan Ct

STAFFORD

VA

22554

United States

* Email

IgnacioJEsteban@Outlook.com

Election District

Garrisonville

* Topic (please see the Public Hearings page for specific topics coming up)

Lower Taxes, Less Spending and NO Rezoning for BUC-EES

*** Online Comments:**

It is time that this county reigns in wasteful spending and returns the hard earned money back to tax payers in Stafford. This budget is bloated and needs a 20 percent reduction to stop this fiscal insanity. These tax increases are not sustainable and need to be reduced dramatically if not eliminated. My petition has close 1,800 signature from resident in Stafford who oppose having Buc-ees off exit 140 for all the reasons in my petition (<https://chng.it/SbydMtPnGf>) Please Read My Petition and the comments made by other residents of Stafford.

There is a saying money saved is money earned and we need to start saving and cut waste while reducing taxes in Stafford. Lets decrease taxes for real estate and property and return our money back to us. Stafford needs a county "DOGE" to reign in the waste, fraud and abuse that exists.

NO REZONING for BUC-EES. This a residential community that is zoned for small businesses and not for a monstrosity like Buc-ees. If tax revenue is an issue, than austerity measures are needed immediately to slash the budget. My taxes have doubled since I moved here in 2019 and this is not fair or sustainable meaning hard decisions have to be made for the good of the county. We need something smaller but yet family friendly that will add value to the properties in the community. Buc-ees would also hurt property values leading to many residents to move out depreciating the value of these houses. Many of us who bought here because of the small town feel and sense of community. Buc-ees with their enormous following would end all of that in this area. We deserve better and demand better from our publicly elected officials.

If this does pass, WE WILL REMEMBER in NOVEMBER.

NO REZONING for BUC-EES - THE BUC STOPS HERE

Thank you,
Ignacio J. Esteban
Austin Ridge Resident

Public Comment Form

COMPLETE

#127

CREATED

PUBLIC
Apr 10th 2025, 12:13:06 pm

IP ADDRESS

98.118.241.13

* Name

Monica Moniz

* Address

9 Azalea Street
Fredericksburg
VA
22406
United States

* Email

wilderme88@gmail.com

Election District

Hartwood

* Topic (please see the Public Hearings page for specific topics coming up)

School Budget

* Online Comments:

We need to fully fund our schools. I moved here from another county and am so confused how you all treat your community and in particular your school system. We need to fully fund our budget for schools. As a mother of 3 I am deeply concerned. Infrastructure will continue to crumble if we do not act now. I am Concerned we are falling way behind other counties in Virginia in education and our teachers will leave for better paying jobs elsewhere. It's absolutely appalling. I am Happy to have my taxes go up if they go towards schools.

Public Comment Form

COMPLETE

#128

CREATED



PUBLIC

Apr 12th 2025, 10:00:54 pm

IP ADDRESS



108.45.96.170

* Name

Stephanie Mojica

* Address

29 Francis Court

Stafford

Virginia

22554

United States

* Email

mojicasj@gmail.com

Election District

Garrisonville

* Topic (please see the Public Hearings page for specific topics coming up)

Against tax increase

* Online Comments:

Dear Bos, I believe we can and should find ways to balance our budget without putting more strain on families by increasing taxes. It will financially hurt many residents, if this tax increase is approved. Please keep Stafford County affordable for EVERYONE. Thank you.

Public Comment Form

COMPLETE

#129

CREATED

 PUBLIC
Apr 13th 2025, 12:08:17 am

IP ADDRESS

 108.45.96.170

* Name

Stephanie Mojica

* Address

29 Francis Court
Stafford
Virginia
22554
United States

* Email

mojicasj@gmail.com

Election District

Garrisonville

* Topic (please see the Public Hearings page for specific topics coming up)

Against tax increase

* Online Comments:

Dear Bos, there has to be another solution to balance the budget without putting more financial strain on families by increasing our taxes. It will financially hurt many residents, if this tax increase is approved. Please keep Stafford County affordable for EVERYONE. Thank you.

Public Comment Form

COMPLETE

#130

CREATED



PUBLIC
Apr 13th 2025, 9:27:59 am

IP ADDRESS



174.224.187.171

* Name

Margaret Beckwith

* Address

81 Peacock Station Drive
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22406
United States

* Email

m_beckwith@verizon.net

Election District

Hartwood

* Topic (please see the Public Hearings page for specific topics coming up)

Tax Increases

* Online Comments:

Enough is enough! Stafford County needs to cut costs, not raise taxes!

Public Comment Form

COMPLETE

#131

CREATED



PUBLIC

Apr 14th 2025, 8:23:43 am

IP ADDRESS



73.216.16.174

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Desaray Walker

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.

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Election District

Rock Hill

* Topic (please see the Public Hearings page for specific topics coming up)

Tax rate increase.

* Online Comments:

We, the residents, simply can not afford another tax increase. The last several years has been a time of non-stop tax hikes with us citizens carrying the burden of trying to make it through each month financially year after year when you guys decide to make it even harder. We're at our breaking point. We have nothing left to give, you're scraping our wallets to the last penny & we can't keep up.

Public Comment Form

COMPLETE

#132

CREATED



PUBLIC

Apr 14th 2025, 8:34:28 am

IP ADDRESS



73.12.121.47

* Name

Shayna Walker

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Election District

Aquia

* Topic (please see the Public Hearings page for specific topics coming up)

County tax increase

* Online Comments:

I have lived here my whole 48 years of my life and I know I speak for a lot of people that have lived here for years when I say enough! Y'all have allowed this district to become over populated and taxes are so unattainable on a normal person's working rage. Personally, my car has had dead tags because of Personal property taxes being so astronomically high!! You can not continue to build and tax this community to death!!

Public Comment Form

COMPLETE

#133

CREATED



PUBLIC

Apr 14th 2025, 8:45:32 am

IP ADDRESS



108.28.154.136

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Sara Pruitt

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Election District

Garrisonville

* Topic (please see the Public Hearings page for specific topics coming up)

Tax increase

* Online Comments:

After the last three years and 31.5% increase in property taxes I am asking the board to not increase taxes. As a resident I am tired of being drained. We cannot afford to continually pay more with nothing to show for it. I am asking the board to attempt to find new ways to save money and balance the budget without putting it further on the residents with property taxes. Thank you!

Public Comment Form

COMPLETE

#134

CREATED



PUBLIC

Apr 14th 2025, 1:33:25 pm

IP ADDRESS



98.118.244.43

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Emily Williams

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Election District

George Washington

* Topic (please see the Public Hearings page for specific topics coming up)

Budget

* Online Comments:

While no one wants to see their property taxes increased, we cannot continue to underfund our schools. We need to be able to hire and retain the best, most qualified teachers, instead of them going North for higher pay. Our teachers are over worked and overwhelmed and we need more of them. We should be able to fund more security for our schools, metal detectors and ideally the new silent panic alarm systems promoted by Alyssa's Law, that directly link to Sheriff's department and are installed on all teachers phone, which saved countless lives at the school shooting in Georgia this past September. We should be able to afford more vape detectors in our High Schools, not just in a few bathrooms and locker rooms they currently exist in. We should be able to pay bus drivers a higher rate, so we have enough of them and are not leaving students and parents stranded. I recently pulled my Stafford High School student mid year to attend a private school, due to the numerous problems there. I do not see why some residents are not jumping for joy at the prospect of having more data centers want to locate in Stafford County and bring in that consistent annual revenue without the county having to provide services, without adding more traffic or housing developments or children to our overcrowded schools. If it could be explained or even better, promised, to residents that this future data center revenue would benefit them by lowering their real estate or other county taxes in the future, I think more of them would be on board. People need specifics on how that money would benefit them specifically.

Public Comment Form

COMPLETE

#135

CREATED



PUBLIC

Apr 14th 2025, 3:05:30 pm

IP ADDRESS



173.71.218.45

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Election District

George Washington

* Topic (please see the Public Hearings page for specific topics coming up)

Real Estate Taxes

* Online Comments:

I have been following the debate and comments regarding the upcoming proposed increase in the real estate tax rate. We were a long-time rural county, but no more. Tax increases are inevitable especially with the increase in population that effects our schools, police, fire and utility systems.

As a lifelong native resident of the county, it pains me to see the over population and the newer residents wanting all the benefits of counties further to the north when they come here. Realizing I can do nothing about that, in my opinion, we need to keep up and support the education system and especially the police and fire departments. None of these départements mentioned here have employees that are paid enough.

I have been watching closely the public hearings and actions taken by the Board of Supervisors. It appears nearly every Board member has seen the tremendous benefits of the data centers with no downsides. Together the staff and supervisors have vetted the proposals from data center developers and have gotten tons of benefits for the county and minimized impacts to residential areas. I applaud them for standing up to pressure that wants them to not bring data centers to the county. Data centers in the right locations bring the benefits that offset tax increases and have the potential to lower the future tax rates at the same time as funding the schools, police, fire and utility departments.

I support the tax increases.

Hunter Greenlaw Jr.

Public Comment Form

COMPLETE

#136

CREATED



PUBLIC

Apr 14th 2025, 4:15:28 pm

IP ADDRESS



104.28.76.154

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Election District

George Washington

* Topic (please see the Public Hearings page for specific topics coming up)

Budget

* Online Comments:

Stafford has seen a massive increase in population in recent years and with that comes the increased demands for public services. The wheres and hows of capital outlay is complicated, but the increases needed are inevitable. We cannot underfund our schools and expect good teachers to remain to teach our children. They will continue to abandon our schools for increased pay elsewhere. We cannot underfund our fire or sheriff's departments and expect our first responders to live in the communities they serve. We cannot underfund our highway department and expect traffic to improve.

That said, we have the blessing to be in an area that is prime for data centers that can fund all of these things without adding additional strain to any of these critical services. If the proper planning can be done to cluster these facilities together in areas that will impact our infrastructure the least, then I think they could bring residents taxes down while increasing our capacity to meet the needs of our residents.

Thank you for your consideration.

I hear people pushing against them, but I think that the data centers can be a great asset to our county with the right strategy in place.

