BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
STAFFORD COUNTY, VIRGINIA
MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING
MARCH 18, 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, March 18, 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 William Ashton, County Administrator; Rysheda McClendon, County Attorney; Taylor Dunn, Deputy Clerk; various staff members; and other interested parties.

INVOCATION

Mr. English led the invocation.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Ms. Allen led the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.

CHAIR REMARKS

Mr. Diggs said that as many of them were aware, they were currently working on the Fiscal Year 2026 budget. He said that residents would have two opportunities to comment on the budget. He said that the first was on March 25, 2025, when they would hold a budget public hearing at the Government Center starting at 6:30 p.m. He said that the second opportunity was on April 15 at 5:00 p.m. at the Government Center, when they would hold the public hearing on the Capital Improvement Program (CIP), tax rates, Virginia Public School Authority (VPSA), and ordinance fee changes.

Mr. Diggs said that the full FY25 proposed budget was available on their website. He said that their goal was to be fully transparent and to maximize public participation as they made these critical decisions impacting the County's future. He said that they appreciated the public’s participation in advance.

Mr. Diggs said that he would also like to mention that Stafford County and Stafford Hospital collaborated on the annual Stafford Hospital Spring Fever 5K, part of the Stafford Race Series, which would take place on Saturday, April 5 at the hospital. He said that he would like to extend his congratulations to the Economic Development and Tour Stafford for their excellent job hosting the Tourism and Marketing Business Summit in January, which drew over 130 participants and offered valuable sessions on social media branding and data analysis.

Mr. Diggs said that additionally, he would like to thank Tourism for their work on the Stafford Wedding Expo, which attracted over 100 attendees. He said that the Marketing Summit and Wedding Expo were held at the Holiday Inn and Conference Center, demonstrating Stafford's commitment to supporting local businesses and the community.

Mr. Diggs said that as they celebrated Women's History Month, he would like to take a moment to recognize and thank all the women who worked hard every day on behalf of their families, communities, and their country. He said that to celebrate their impact, they had prepared a special video on one of Stafford's remarkable women, Corrine Melchers, the wife of artist Gary Melchers. He said that they may not be aware that Corrine had a far-reaching impact on Stafford County, which is still felt today.

Mr. Diggs said that he would like to take a moment to acknowledge the women in their County who did a phenomenal job for them. He said that he would also like to recognize the women sitting at the dais, including Supervisor Vanuch, Dr. Yeung, Vice Chair Allen, Supervisor Gary, their County Attorney, Ms. McClendon, and Deputy County Administrator, Ms. Donna Krauss.

Mr. Diggs said that he would also like to extend his appreciation to their Budget Director, Ms. Light, Economic Development Director, Ms. Liz Barber, and Supervisor Bohmke, who was joining the meeting virtually today. He said that they appreciated their dedication and service.

PRESENTATIONS

A PROCLAMATION COMMENDING THE LANGLEY FLIGHT FOUNDATION PRESENTED BY DELEGATE PAUL MILDE

Paul Milde said that he was pleased to be back in this room for two reasons: first, he would be recognizing four outstanding Stafford residents, and second, he was happy to be on this side of the dais during budget time, knowing he could leave when serious decisions needed to be made. He said that he appreciated being there.

Mr. Milde said that these individuals were truly exceptional Stafford residents, having dedicated decades of their personal time to thinking about and preserving Stafford's rich history. He said that without people like them, he was not sure where the County would be. He said that it was his distinct honor to stand before them to present a commendation resolution from the Virginia General Assembly and the House of Delegates, recognizing the Langley Flight Foundation's impressive exhibit at the Stafford Regional Airport. He said that this resolution became a permanent record of their accomplishment, joining a legacy that dated back to 1619 in the House of Burgesses.

Mr. Milde said that the remarkable exhibit, particularly highlighting Aerodrome Number Five, was truly impressive. He said that their vision and perseverance in bringing this project to fruition had been remarkable, overcoming challenges and expenses along the way. He said that he highly recommended visiting the airport to see the exhibit; it was truly inspiring. He said that he wanted to emphasize that their dedication to preserving and promoting the rich aviation history of the region was truly commendable.

Mr. Milde said that the Langley Flight Foundation's efforts had resulted in an exhibit that not only educated but also inspired future generations to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. He said that it served as a reminder of the pioneering spirit and innovative genius of Samuel Pierpoint Langley, whose contributions to aviation continued to influence the industry of aviation today. Please accept this resolution, which he was about to read, as part of a symbol of their appreciation for their hard work and dedication. He said that they were grateful for their contributions to the community and looked forward to their continued success.

Mr. Milde read the proclamation.

Chris Hornung said that he wanted to express his gratitude to the Stafford Board of Supervisors for entrusting them with their funds for this project. He said that it was a remarkable experience to work with them all to bring the project to fruition. He said that he hoped they would be proud of the outcome and that it would serve as a foundation for future endeavors. He said that they had several objectives in mind for the future, including expanding business opportunities in Stafford County, supporting science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education for their students, and showcasing the County's tourism potential. He said that they looked forward to collaborating with them again in the future. He said that to that end, he wanted to thank the Stafford Historical Society for their invaluable support, as well as the many business community members who contributed to the project's success. He said that their trust and support were instrumental in bringing this project to completion.

Mr. Diggs said that before they proceeded, he would like to acknowledge two women he did not mention earlier who helped him advance Stafford, and he would like to call them out. He said that Emily Torrey, who was their Assistant Director for Developmental Services and Maggie Spivey, their Media Specialist, were integral to their progress in Stafford and he thanked them for all their hard work.

ADDITIONS – DELETIONS AND APPROVAL OF THE REGULAR AGENDA

William Ashton, County Administrator, said that Item 3 concerned an appeal of the denial of a special exception under the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance Chapter 27(B) for the proposed development on tax parcel number 54-68B, which had been removed at the applicant's request. He said that there was also an addition to the agenda, which was an update for the Economic Development presentation, where the Economic Development Authority would consider bond issuance for English Oaks to repair and remodel the existing affordable housing senior community. He said that the project budget for English Oaks was now included in the folders in front of the Board.

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

Ms. Vanuch made a substitute motion, seconded by Mr. English, to move Item 9 to be heard immediately after the 6:30 p.m. public comment period, along with the recommended amendments to the regular agenda.

The Voting Board tally was:

Yea: (7) Allen, Bohmke, Diggs, English, Gary, Vanuch, Yeung
No: (0)

WORK SESSION ITEMS

ITEM 1. CAPITAL PROJECTS TRANSPORTATION; COURTHOUSE TARGETED DEVELOPMENT AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY

Matthew Lehane, Transportation Planning and Funding Manager, said that today, he was here to present on the Courthouse Targeted Development Area Transportation Study, which they previously discussed in October. He said that the purpose and need of this study was to understand the transportation impacts of approved development, specifically several million square feet of commercial, warehouse, industrial, and data center space, as well as several hundred residential units.

Me. Lehane said that they examined existing conditions and found that the study area was operating under capacity in 2024, although certain intersections, such as Courthouse Road at Mine Road, Courthouse Road at Wyche Road, Hospital Center Boulevard, and Route 1, and Courthouse Road and Route 1, were over capacity during the evening peak hour. He said that to address this, they would implement additional transportation improvements, including projects from Stafford County and proffered initiatives. He said that their analysis indicated that by 2035, the study area would experience a 73% growth rate, resulting in increased traffic congestion.

Mr. Lehane said that specifically, intersections such as Courthouse Road at Mine Road, Courthouse Road at Wyche Road, Hospital Center Boulevard, and Route 1, and Courthouse Road and Route 1 would be over capacity. He said that they evaluated several scenarios to alleviate traffic conditions and found that a particular scenario could reduce person hours of delay by approximately 40% by constructing Mine Road, Woodcutters Road, Kellogg Mill Road Extension, and Wyche Road Extension, which were essentially grid solutions that could alleviate traffic on Route 1 and other roads such as Courthouse Road. He said that the draft study was included in the packet and was available for any questions the Board may have.

Mr. Lehane said that these results indicated a significant reduction in person hours of delay by 2035, although there was still a need for further study, particularly on Route 1 and the parallel western network. He said that next steps would be to create a webpage on the County website to display the study results and incorporate the results into the comprehensive plan at the Board's direction, such as the five-year plan update.

Dr. Yeung said that they were re-studying Mine Road and Courthouse Road again, despite the fact that every developer or company should be conducting a current transportation impact study. She said that she was surprised that they were doing this again. She said that she was concerned that they were re-examining something that they should already have a handle on, especially if the numbers they were seeing were not accurate.

Dr. Yeung said that she had been told by others with engineering experience that the actual numbers were significantly higher than developer estimates, and that this discrepancy could have a major impact on their planning. She said that she was wondering if this new transportation study included a more comprehensive set of numbers that they had not accounted for in their previous study.

Mr. Lehane said that that was the intended purpose. He said that he was unable to confirm whether they accurately counted the traffic impact analyses (TIA); he had not reviewed the past 10 or 15 TIAs performed for the development area. He said that however, they did include several million square feet of new approved projects, including residential units and data center space, in this study. He said that the resulting traffic volume was approximately 40,000 vehicles per day.

ITEM 2. BUDGET WORK SESSION; TRANSPORTATION, UTILITIES, SERVICE DISTRICTS

Andrea Light, Chief Director of Financial Services, said that she was joined today by Bryon Counsell, Chief Engineer, and Chris Edwards, Chief Operations Officer, to review the proposed budget for the tax rate and other funds. She said that their goal was to provide the Board and the community with an overview of these other funds, excluding the General Fund, which they had discussed in detail at their last work session on March 11.

Ms. Light said that they would review proposed tax rates, other funds, the Transportation Fund, the Utilities Fund, and then ask the Board for direction on the proposed tax rate, which they would advertise this afternoon, as well as any additional information needed to make decisions and any direction on strategic outcomes. She said that the displayed chart provided a list of tax rates for the other funds they would be discussing tonight.

Ms. Light said that there were no proposed changes to any of the tax rates on these other funds, and they would delve into the nuances of each. She said that the Fire and Emergency Services levy was currently $0.0131 cents on the real estate tax and was proposed to remain unchanged; these rates were for capital costs only. She said that currently, the Rock Hill Station and Aquia Station were ongoing projects in Fiscal Year 26, along with apparatus and replacement ambulances.

Ms. Light said that the Hidden Lake fund was a special revenue fund proposed at $0.06, with no tax rate change. She said that this tax included loan repayment and annual maintenance funding. She said that their Tourism Fund accounted for 3% of their Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT). She said that in contrast, Stafford County had a 9% TOT, with 4% allocated directly to the General Fund for sports tourism and Parks and Recreation, and 2% for capital projects supporting parks projects. She said that this year, they would continue to support Musselman Park in Fiscal Year 25 and the Carl Lewis Center in Fiscal Year 26. She said that there were no significant changes in the Tourism funds.

Ms. Light said that their Asset Forfeiture Fund encompassed all federal and state funding administered by the Sheriff's Office and the Commonwealth Attorney. She said that they also had an Armed Services Fund, which accounted for the revenues and expenditures related to their Armed Services Memorial, located out front. She said that additionally, they had a Debt Service Fund, established in Fiscal Year 25 to track revenues and expenditures associated with debt service, except for those of the Utilities Fund.

Ms. Light said that the Utilities Fund operated differently and had seen significant growth since 2025, primarily due to increases in school-related debt. She said that this fund provided a centralized location for viewing County debt, making it a useful resource for budget analysis. She said that the E-Summons Fund, established in July 2021, accounted for fees collected from citizens resolving cited violations.

Bryon Counsell, Chief Engineer, said that on the screen, from left to right, the Garrisonville Road Service District was the only active service district for general transportation needs in the County; the others had been set to zero. He said that this one was active and collected revenue for projects in the Garrisonville area, which they used almost every year to apply to past projects for recompensation or upcoming projects in the district. He said that the Lake Arrowhead Service District was created in 2017 to address dam regulatory improvements for the large lake.

Mr. Counsell said that that project was nearing advertisement and was expected to go to construction in the spring and summer. He said that the Lake Carroll Service District was currently under discussion, with no proposed change to the tax rate. He said that the Board had a consensus about a month ago and directed staff to advertise the project in the late summer, allowing for the fall clearing and grubbing season for the long-eared bat and reevaluating costs at that time.

Mr. Counsell said that the Lynhaven Lane Service District aimed to bring the private road, Lynhaven Lane, into the public road system, but had faced right-of-way acquisition challenges. He said that as a result, the tax rate was set at zero, pending further consideration. He said that the Board would be presented with the option to dissolve the service district or put the project on hold indefinitely.

Mr. Counsell said that staff had advised that if the Board decided to refund tax money paid to the service district, it could be paid to the taxpayer, although some work would be involved in making this happen. He said that moving forward to the Transportation CIP, the Board had approved a modification to the proposed plan after its work session on May 11. He said that the direction was to de-scope the Garrisonville Road project and shift its focus to an intersection and operational-based approach.

Mr. Counsell said that this would result in a reduction of approximately $7 million to $9 million, which could then be allocated towards their wedge-widening program to cover about seven or eight roads listed in the bond referendum for that purpose. He said that this was the primary change to the proposed Transportation Capital Improvement Plan.

Chris Edwards, Chief Operating Officer, said that prior to the FY24 budget, and as they had previously discussed in November during the work session, the Utilities Department conducted a rate study, which was presented to the Board. He said that the study recommended a 6.5% annual increase over three years, designed to support 3R and capital projects, offset inflation and increasing operational costs, and ensuring that Utilities Fund employees received the same raises as General Fund employees. He said that this year's rate increase followed the same assumptions in the model.

Mr. Edwards said that while a portion of the additional revenues covered increasing operational costs, the remainder was allocated to 3R initiatives, including the replacement of aging water mains, upgrades to the sewer system, and significant work at the Smith Lake Water Treatment Plant. He said that given the scope of the improvements at the Smith Lake plant, this funding should be sufficient. He said that the budget also included the Utilities facility expansion, primarily to accommodate reuse and industrial water cooling.

Mr. Edwards said that the Utilities Department had a couple of requested positions, which was a reduction from their request in November. He said that two of the positions were part-time, and they planned to convert their interns to part-time employees. He said that this was a solution to address the issue of recruiting and retaining students, as well as employees who were pursuing higher education. He said that they had had success with their internship program, winning National Association of Counties (NACo) and Virginia Association of Counties (VACo) awards, and this would enable them to bring them on as employees upon graduation. He said that they were also requesting one procurement specialist to assist with purchasing needs.

Dr. Yeung asked if they could raise the Warrenton Service District to a penny.

Ms. Light said that if the Board decided to change the tax rate from zero to a penny and advertised it as such, then the Board could proceed with that change.

Mr. English asked if the Asset Forfeiture Fund was primarily a function of the Sheriff's Office.

Ms. Light said that there were federal funds specifically allocated to the Sheriff's Department, as well as state funds that covered both the Commonwealth Attorney's Office and the Sheriff's Department. She said that several years ago, prior to her arrival, the Sheriff's Department had a significant revenue source from a cigarette bust, resulting in funds that were currently being held on the books. She said that these funds were subject to audit and review by the state, and the Sheriff could use them for specific purposes.

Mr. English asked if it was possible that they could utilize some of those funds to upgrade the Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) system. He said that it was a significant budget item. He said that he was simply wondering if it was feasible to consider this option.

Ms. Light said that she could ask them about that potential.

Ms. Bohmke said that she had a couple of questions. She said that she believed that they were still charging a fee for court usage. She said that the fees collected were being used to offset their future debt service on the construction of the new court building. She said that she did not see this information included in the provided document. She said that she wondered if she had missed it, or if they had discontinued this practice.

Ms. Light said that the funds in question were not part of this presentation because those funds came into the General Fund. She said that typically, it was around $35,000 per year. She said that if they were not used for maintenance, they accumulated in fund balance for future use as a one-time funding source for the courthouse, and also to pay the debt service in the future, as she had mentioned.

Ms. Bohmke asked if there were other funds embedded in the General Fund that they should display as a separate item, as they were dedicated to specific projects.

Ms. Light said that they had various dedicated revenues in the General Fund, each serving a specific purpose. She said that the Parks and Recreation Department was a good example of this, as they received fees from gymnastics programs and other activities that supported those initiatives. She said that she was not aware of any other revenue source that was similarly dedicated to a specific maintenance or construction project, like the courthouse construction fee was. She said that she would review their revenue streams to determine if there were any other examples like this.

Ms. Bohmke said that on page 6,under the Garrisonville Road Service District, this service district had been in existence for a long time. She said that unlike the other service districts, such as Lake Arrowhead and Lake Carroll, which clearly outlined the County loan or project. She said that she had a constituent two years ago who owned a business off of Garrisonville Road and struggled to find information about the Garrisonville Service District. She said that she believed it would be beneficial to provide more details about what the service district was paying for, so the public was aware of the specifics. She said that this would help to clarify the information and provide a better understanding for their constituents.

Ms. Light said that they would make sure to address this issue in the future. She said that in their budget book, they had information about the Garrisonville Road Service District, which in November 2008, voters had approved a referendum authorizing the general obligation debt for the Garrisonville Road area road improvements. She said that the project had been funded with bonds, service district tax, and state revenue sharing. She said that Series 2013 bonds had been issued in June 2013. She said that in Fiscal Year 2026, most of the revenue was being used to pay debt service, with relatively little activity in the service district. She said that they would certainly note more information next time.

Ms. Bohmke said that she would like to ask one final question regarding the Utilities Fund. She said that she would like to know from Mr. Edwards, as they were in the third year of a 6.5% percent rate increase, what the projected rate increase would be for the next year and the following years. She said that she would also like to know if the consulting firm had had any discussions with Mr. Edwards regarding these projections at this point in time.

Mr. Edwards said that they had finally obtained the necessary information from their rate consultant, which included their Capital Improvement Program, within the last two or three weeks.

He said that as a result, the rate consultant would likely work on determining the new rate requirements over the next two or three months, and would assess what needed to be done to achieve their Capital Improvement Program and operational budgets.

Dr. Yeung said that for new companies opening up on Warrenton Road versus Garrisonville Road, she was interested in knowing if they did not have to pay into the service district, while those in Garrisonville did.

Mr. Counsell said that the purpose of the revenue generated by the tax in the service district was to pay down either debt for a recent project or to anticipate payment and contribute to it on an ongoing basis for a future project. He said that there were no such projects in the Warrenton Road Service District. He said that the Board could create projects or establish a service district, increase the tax rate, and create a fund to pay for future projects. He said that he had the Warrenton Road widening project, which Mr. Lehane could provide more details about. He said that at present, there was no contribution from the service district to pay down any costs for road projects in that district.

Mr. Lehane said that currently, within the Warrenton Road Service District, the only project that would technically qualify for funding was the Warrenton Road Widening Project. He said that they would discuss this project in more detail later this evening, as part of their revenue sharing presentation on the agenda. He said that one potential option to consider was increasing the tax rate to help fund the local contribution for this project.

Mr. Lehane said that in the Garrisonville Service District, the only project currently being funded was the Staffordboro Boulevard Sidewalk Project, which was expected to receive bids tomorrow. He said that this was a promising development. He said that however, after that, they did not have any future projects planned for the Garrisonville Service District, aside from paying off the debt service that Ms. Light had previously mentioned.

Mr. English said that he had thought they were going to use the Warrenton Road Service District to help pay for the work on Truslow Road.

Mr. Counsell said that that topic had been discussed by the Board on a couple of occasions, and to his knowledge, there was no consensus to move forward with it at that time.

Mr. Diggs said that next were presentations and reports by departments. He said that he wanted everyone to understand, particularly in the context of the upcoming tax conversation, was that they valued everyone’s input and were committed to making it as easy as possible for them to share their thoughts on the tax issue. He said that Item 9 was the public hearing for the tax rate, which would be advertised after the public presentations, scheduled for 6:30 p.m., allowing the Board to hear from the public first.

PRESENTATIONS/REPORTS BY DEPARTMENTS

ITEM 3. DEVELOPMENT SERVICES; CONSIDER AN APPEAL OF THE DENIAL OF A SPECIAL EXCEPTION UNDER THE CHESAPEAKE BAY PRESERVATION ORDINANCE (CHAPTER 27B) FOR DEEVLOPMENT PROPOSED ON TAX MAP PARCEL NO. 54-68B

This item was removed from the agenda per the applicant’s request.

ITEM 4. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT; R25-34; CONSIDER APPROVING A MOU BETWEEN THE COUNTY AND THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (EDA)

Liz Barber, Director of Economic Development, said that on January 28, 2025, the Board had a work session where they discussed the draft of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Economic Development Authority and the Board of Supervisors. She said that they provided her with valuable feedback at that meeting, and she was here to present a revised agreement that addresses three specific points mentioned. She said that one of the key changes was the redlining of a section related to the strategic plan, which was that once a strategic plan was developed for the Economic Development Authority, this agreement would return to the Board for review. She said that an additional redline was to shorten the term of the agreement to a maximum of three years. She said that finally, they added a line item that requires the Economic Development Authority on its own or through a contractor agent to create incentives and programs to promote economic development and support the joint mission, as funding allows. She said that this should provide the Board of Supervisors with clear expectations and ground rules for the partnership with the EDA.

Ms. Bohmke said that as Ms. Barber mentioned, the Board had several requests, one of which pertained to the attorneys' involvement in land use matters. She said that she did not see any mention of this in the agreement that had been submitted, specifically the red line copy. She said that she was curious to know why this aspect was not included in the agreement.

Ms. Barber said that from what she recalled, that item had been voted on by consensus, and it had been voted to not be included.

Mr. Diggs said that that was correct.

Ms. barber said that they had received some language that had been suggested by County Administration, in collaboration with the Economic Development staff, which could serve as a common ground to address that issue. She said that they had also received some feedback from the County Attorney's Office, although she was not sure if that was something Ms. McClendon would want to discuss. She said that specifically, the County may not have the flexibility to add language regarding conflicts of interest, as this was a built-in assumption.

Ms. Bohmke asked for clarification regarding how that was built in to the agreement.

Ms. McClendon said that the only feedback they had to provide was that they must follow the Board's direction. She said that since there was no consensus direction in the majority vote of the Board regarding the addition of language, the language was not included and was not presented to the Economic Development Authority for consideration. She said that if the Board's direction was to add the language, they needed to take the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) back to the EDA to ensure they were in agreement before both bodies could mutually agree on that language.

Ms. Bohmke said that given that the language was not included in this document, she would not be able to support it. She said that she appreciated the clarification.

Dr. Yeung said that one of her concerns during the work session was the lack of clarity regarding the staff involved, whether it was Economic Development Office staff or EDA, and she still had that difficulty in distinguishing that when looking at the redlined and clean versions of the document.

Dr. Yeung said that the document stated that the EDA shall, either on its own or through its contractor or agent, prepare and approve the EDA's formal budget request to the Stafford County Board of Supervisors. She said that to her, "shall" implied a mandatory obligation, indicating a requirement that must be met. She said that she was trying to determine the associated cost of this obligation within the document.

Dr. Yeung said that the mention of the mission was not sufficient to alleviate her concerns, as she had hoped for a strategic plan, although she understood it was forthcoming. She said that she was uncertain about the Board's stance on this matter, but she wanted to ensure that any Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) they signed clearly outlined their intentions, work requirements, and goals.

Ms. barber said that as a point of clarification, the EDA did not have staff. She said that therefore, when referring to staff, it was County staff that should be considered. She said that in her role as their liaison, as part of her job description through the County, she served as the connection between the EDA and County staff. She said that when the document referred to any staff, it was always referring to County staff.

Ms. Vanuch said that she appreciated the addition of letter B, as funding allowed, creating incentives and programs to promote economic development in support of their joint mission. She said that she felt it was essential to include this to clearly outline the role of the EDA. She said that she was having a difficult time reconciling her overall support for the document with the fact that they were not addressing a critical concern.

Ms. Vanuch said that one of the intents of creating the MOU was to address the perception that an attorney representing the EDA could also serve as a developer's broker to the Board of Supervisors. She said that this created a perception of impropriety, even if it did not necessarily rise to the level of a conflict of interest at the level of the state code’s definition. She said that the perception of impropriety was concerning and she wanted it to be addressed in the MOU.

Ms. Vanuch said that she had shared her concerns at the work session, stating that she would not support the document unless this issue was addressed. She said that related to Dr. Yeung’s comments, she thought it was essential to acknowledge that, under the previous Economic Development director, there were challenges between the EDA and the Economic Development Director, who seemed to think the EDO staff worked for the EDA. She said that Dr. Yeung's point about clarifying that the EDA was not County staff was a valid one, and she believed it would greatly benefit their mission. She said that unless these two concerns were addressed, she would not be able to support this document.

Ms. Gary said that she appreciated Ms. Barber’s work on this MOU; it appeared that she had carefully considered the Board's wishes and their desired direction, and had brought them a solid proposal to move forward with. She said that she was grateful for that and appreciated everything the EDA was doing. She said that she believed she had previously mentioned that they had a path forward with them that was a bit more promising than in the past, and this proposal was part of that. She said that she was ready to move forward with it.

Ms. McClendon said that any changes the Board wished to make should be reviewed by the EDA to ensure they were mutually agreed upon.

Ms. Barber said that according to section B, the EDA required certain support from the County, including staff from the Economic Development Department, which was how staff was defined.

Ms. Vanuch said that it should be clarified that the EDA did not have staff.

Ms. Barber said that they could definitely consider that option, but with the caveat that there was no reason they could not hire staff. She said that if they chose to hire staff, they would be limited to never hiring staff because it would not align with the Memorandum of Understanding. She said that that was something to consider.

Dr. Yeung asked Ms. McClendon if her department had reviewed this MOU and found it to be a well-articulated legal agreement.

Ms. McClendon said that yes, their office had been involved in the process prior to the Board's work session and also prior to today's meeting. She said that they believed that the Economic Development Department staff had clearly defined the document, and they did not have any issues with it. She said that they believed it accurately reflected the Board's intent from the work session.

Ms. Allen motioned, seconded by Ms. Gary, to approve Proposed Resolution R25-34.

The Voting Board tally was:

Yea: (4) Allen, Diggs, Gary, Yeung
No: (3) Bohmke, English, Vanuch

ITEM 5. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT; PRESENT THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY’S (EDA) CONSIDERATION OF BOND ISSUANCE FOR ENGLISH OAKS TO REPAIR AND REMODEL THE EXISTING AFFORDABLE HOUSING SENIOR COMMUNITY

Liz Barber, Director of Economic Development, said that she was bringing this matter to the Board today for review and discussion, as it would be considered by the Board in the future. She said that this was an informational item at this time. She said that the EDA was considering a bond request from April Housing, a company managing the existing Stafford County affordable housing senior community, English Oaks, located in the Falmouth District.

Ms. Barber said that this discussion was outlined in the background report, which began in August when their department received an email from the EDA expressing interest in learning more about obtaining equity bonds for a revitalization project at an affordable senior living community. She said that at that time, the EDA had expressed willingness to hear more about the proposal. She said that in December, a meeting was held with the County Administrator, William Ashton, the former Chair, Meg Bohmke, the EDA Chair, and another EDA member, along with staff members, to clarify the request and its implications for the community.

Ms. Barber said that as a result, they had learned that English Oaks had 119 units receiving low-income housing tax credits (LIHTC) set to expire in 2033. She said that private equity bonds were necessary to maintain these federal tax credits, allowing the them to keep rents below market rate for current residents. She said that without this bond, the community would not be able to maintain affordable housing for seniors in the area.

Ms. Barber said that the bond request proposed a maximum amount of $32,500,000, which would enable the community to continue maintaining affordable housing while modernizing the units, including roads, roofing, exteriors, security appliances, and countertops. She said that one of the requests they had received prior to today's meeting was from Ms. Bohmke, who had requested a budget breakdown. She said that this had been added to their packet, allowing them to see how those funds would be allocated.

Ms. Barber said that the EDA served as the conduit for this process, as there were limited means for obtaining bonds. She said that at the same meeting where the EDA had heard more about this in February, a bond attorney from McGuire Woods had provided legal counsel to help them understand the implications and risks involved for the EDA and the Board of Supervisors. She said that during that meeting, they had learned that if the EDA approved the issuance of bonds, it did not constitute an endorsement of the borrower's creditworthiness or the project's viability.

Ms. Barber said that neither the County nor the EDA would be financially obligated in the event of a default. She said that in other words, the County or EDA would not be on the hook for these bonds. She said that the benefit lies in the fee the EDA gains by applying for these bonds, which can be used for economic development incentives and programs. She said that on the positive side, the EDA will be able to maintain an affordable housing community for seniors, who are among the highest-risk populations, and continue to receive federal tax credits for their community, and the EDA also benefits from this arrangement. She said that she had also included the slideshow presented to the EDA in the back of the Board package.

Ms. Barber said that one of the key takeaways from the EDA was that they want to ensure the Board was aware they were discussing this before going through the bond process. She said that they were having a public hearing to announce this to the community, and they wanted to maintain open communication with the Board to build a strong relationship. She said that at this point, they planned to hold a public hearing on April 11. She said that if there were any additional items the Board would like to see or a more detailed presentation, this was an opportunity to do so. She said that the application for the bond was due at the end of April. She said that April Housing would be available to answer questions or address any concerns, as the EDA served as the conduit for this project, rather than the project team itself.

Ms. Vanuch said that to clarify, the project was for 119 units, which were already existing.

Ms. Barber said that was correct.

Ms. Vanuch said that they were not increasing density; rather, they were assisting them in upgrading and renovating the existing units with newer technology and amenities.

Ms. Barber said that that was correct; they were built in 2003, so that marked the last major renovation they had. She said that they were attempting to modernize the facilities and incorporate security measures. She said that they also discussed various accessibility features as part of the overall improvements.

Dr. Yeung said that addressing housing issues in the County was very important to her. She said that this item was new to her; she did not recall Ms. Bohmke bringing up this information last year. She said that as a member of the George Washington Regional Commission Housing Committee and the Executive Committee, and having conversations with Mr. English about housing, she said she would like to be more informed on this matter and receive any details, presentations, or information they had. She said that she believed this was a fantastic idea. She said that she wanted to ensure that they continued down this path, not only for their seniors, but also for their professionals, firefighters, teachers, and children.

Mr. English said that he agreed that this was a good investment. He said that he had spoken to Jack about it, and he believed it was something that was necessary. He said that the seniors living in this area were on low income, and he had personally spoken to several residents who called this facility home. He said that as a result, he was wholeheartedly in support of this project.

Ms. Gary said that she completely supported this initiative. She said that she also wanted to express her thanks to anyone who had worked on this project and the significant amount of time they had invested. She said that this was a crucial issue, as Dr. Yeung had mentioned, and the cost of housing was unaffordable for many people in their area. She said that they should not miss this opportunity to support their community and prevent people from losing their homes, which were essential for their well-being. She said that she was truly grateful for this opportunity, and she appreciated the efforts that had gone into making it possible.

Ms. Bohmke said that it was correct that Mr. Ashton and she, along with others, met with April Housing in December. She said that she explicitly stated her support for the project at that time. She said that she knew someone who lived in the community, and it was a great area, but definitely needed some upgrades. She said that however, when they left the meeting, she asked April Housing for information on the entire project and the total breakdown of financing numbers.

Ms. Bohmke said that as someone who used to work in this field, she was surprised that she never received any updates from them. She said that today, she asked County Administration about those updated numbers she had requested, and this was why they have now have the information in the add-on folder.

Ms. Bohmke said that she had been reviewing the financing of the project since 4:30 p.m., analyzing the numbers, and trying to understand them. She said that as she mentioned before, she was very much in favor of the project, but she had concerns about sending it to public hearing given the 119 units and $32 million in funding, which translated to $273,000 per unit. She said that she had concerns about some of the costs related to the financing.

Ms. Bohmke said that given that this project was in her district, she had not had the opportunity to thoroughly review these numbers. She said that she was not in a position to send this to public hearing at this time. She said that instead, she would like to defer this to the next meeting and request a virtual call or meeting with April Housing and their consultants to gain a deeper understanding of the numbers behind the project.

Mr. Diggs said that to clarify, this was an informational item and the Board was not taking any action on this item; the EDA would be holding the public hearing.

Ms. Bohmke said that she was not in favor of the public hearing for April 11 until she could have more conversations about finances of the project.

Ms. Allen said that she did not have an issue with the project, as one of the key components that she liked was the fact that they were going to improve accessibility. She said that as someone who worked in the hospital, she saw firsthand the impact that preventable falls could have on seniors, and she believed that improving accessibility was crucial for their safety. She said that she thought it was essential to clarify that the EDA was taking the lead on this project, and it was driven by their efforts. She said that this presentation to the Board was a courtesy to keep everyone informed.

Ms. Barber said that part of the description included that there was a specific Virginia Code section that would require the Board of Supervisors to pass a resolution to allow the EDA to move forward. She said that there was action that needed to be taken, but it was not happening today. She said that the EDA wanted to hold a public hearing, gather public input, review the project further, and then return to the Board by the end of April for approval.

Ms. Allen said that this arrangement would not put the EDA or the County at financial risk. She said that the financial burden lay with the April properties, and the EDA would benefit from utilizing the incentives they had discussed. She said that in essence, they were acting as middlemen, generating a profit without assuming any financial risk. She said that she did not see what the issue was with this arrangement.

Ms. Vanuch asked if Ms. Bohmke would like to have this item return to the Board at the April 1 meeting, not on the Consent Agenda but in the staff presentation items.

Ms. Bohmke said that she thought that was a great idea because if they wanted to hold the public hearing on April 11, she would have an opportunity to review with them the financing side of this transaction beforehand. She said that she believed it was fair that they did this, as their Economic

Development was issuing the bonds on their behalf, and they needed to understand the components of the financing. She said that this was their fiduciary responsibility, regardless of the fact that Stafford County was not on the hook for anything; she still believed they had a responsibility because they were using the Stafford County Economic Development name in this transaction.

Ms. McClendon said that the Board's action should occur after the EDA completed the public hearing and authorized financing. She said that the Board's approval served as the final step in the financing process. She said that therefore, if they returned on April 1, the EDA would have not yet held their public hearing or made a decision or recommendation to this body.

Ms. Vanuch asked if they could have another informational session on this item scheduled for April 1.

Mr. Diggs said that he had no issue with the proposal returning, but he would like to hear from the representatives who were present if they were willing to share their thoughts on the matter.

Perica Bell, Managing Director and Head of Preservation at April Housing, said that she would like to apologize for the miscommunication regarding the development budget. She said that they did have the budget, and it was also presented to the State of Virginia, which allocates tax-exempt bonds, including mortgage revenue bonds. She said that she understood that the Board had just received the budget information. She said that she could provide an overview of the budget and a brief summary of the sources and uses if that would be helpful.

Ms. Bell said that however, she understood the County must follow their established processes, and they would also follow their guidelines. She said that with that in mind, the total development costs for this project were approximately $51 million. She said that she would like to reframe this as a redevelopment project, rather than a renovation, as they were completely modernizing the systems of the entire property.

Ms. Bell said that this project involved the construction of 119 cottages, which were not just interior renovations but a comprehensive redevelopment process. She said that the majority of the development cost was allocated to the acquisition, which generated acquisition credits. She said that the $25 million allocated for acquisition was comprised of two components: equity from their tax credit investor and a seller carryback note, which was April Housing's own financing.

Ms. Bell said that this project did not receive local support in terms of sources. She said that they were not receiving any local funding from cities, counties, or the state, and therefore, that funding was covering the acquisition cost. She said that the second component was the actual construction of the property, which was estimated to be around $10 million.

Ms. Bell said that this included the costs of the units themselves, such as countertops, gutters, roofs, and windows. She said that these were the tangible aspects of construction that people typically thought of. She said that the remaining component was what they called "soft costs," which encompassed everything else, including legal fees, construction interest, resident relocation costs, and a developer fee.

Ms. Bell said that the developer fee was particularly noteworthy, as 80% of it was deferred until the project was stabilized in cash flow. She said that their three primary sources of funding were tax credit equity, proceeds from private activity bonds, which were sold either privately or publicly, and they repaid them using the net operating income from the rents.

Ms. Bell said that it was essential to note that there was no public indebtedness to the voters or the public, as they were not issuing any bonds that would require voter approval. She said that the project was self-contained, and the three primary sources of funding were the bonds, the tax credit, and the proceeds from the tax credit, as well as the equity from the bonds and their own financing of $10 to $15 million, which was retained within the project.

Mr. Diggs said that he appreciated Ms. Bell providing the breakdown of financing costs.

Ms. Bohmke said that she was in favor of proceeding with the proposal going to public hearing on April 11. She said that she would like to have a conversation with April Housing regarding the fee structures outlined on the financing sheet. She said that this was the most important aspect for her to understand.

Ms. Bohmke said that as Stafford County had not previously undertaken a project of this nature, she believed it was crucial that they thoroughly comprehend the implications of their actions and not simply grant approval without a clear understanding. She said that from the outset, she had expressed her support for the project, but she also believed it was essential that they approach it with a critical and informed perspective. She said that she would address her remaining questions with April Housing when she was back in town.

Dr. Yeung said that she would like to join Ms. Bohmke in meeting with the developer to learn more about the entire process. She said that she would like to learn more about the relocation plan for the current residents as well.

ITEM 6. CAPITAL PROJECTS TRANSPORTATION; CONSIDER APPROVING APPLICATIONS FOR VDOT REVENUE SHARING AND VDOT TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES (TAP) GRANT PROGRAMS; PROPOSED RESOLUTION R25-68 (REVENUE SHARING), PROPOSED RESOLUTION R25-69 (TAP)

Matt Lehane, Transportation Planning and Funding Manager, said that the Board saw the majority of these details in in the prior work session on February 25. He said that today they would focus on revenue sharing and TAP. He said that revenue sharing was a 50-50 matching program, with a $5 million annual allocation over a two-year funding cycle. He said that TAP was a federal funding program for bicycle-pedestrian projects, with a 20% match, approximately $3 to $5 million available, and $1.3 million in the North Stafford set-aside.

Mr. Lehane said that this presentation outlined the potential process for bicycle-pedestrian projects, including Mine Road and Greenspring and Kings Highway and Chatham Heights Road, which were currently in engineering at about 30% design. He said that they had also discussed the U.S. Route 17 bicycle project, potentially re-scoping it.

Mr. Lehane said that staff had recommendations for the Barrett Heights Road sidewalk project, the Falmouth Elementary sidewalk project, and Belmont Ferry Farm Trail, which was scheduled for the out-years in the Capital Improvement Plan. He said that they were also exploring additional options to accelerate this program in a more cost-effective manner. He said that their goal was to complete approximately two projects every two years within the current revenue-sharing and TAP funding cycle.

Mr. Lehane said that regarding their prioritization process for TAP, they provided the actual Smart Scale scoring metric, which was also part of their Transportation Master Plan. He said that the projects had been selected based on this metric. He said that revenue-sharing for Onville Road widening was also proposed to replace funds in their Transportation Fund, with an estimated $4.5 million request.

Mr. Lehane said that they had also placed a placeholder for the Poplar and Truslow Road project, pending discussions in May with the Board to discuss the turn lane versus roundabout project. He said that additionally, for Route 1 at Foreston Woods Drive, they intended to continue moving forward with the Smart Scale project in Round 6 for Round 7. He said that the Warrenton Road widening project, which they had discussed earlier, was also in Round 6 and would be brought forward into Round 7 to hopefully increase leveraged funding.

Mr. Lehane said that they would be continuing to work with VDOT to make use of local funding for a TAP match to acquire additional grant funding for bike and pedestrian projects. He said that furthermore, they had $700,000 in proffers to be used for a traffic signal at Centreport Parkway and Mountainview Road. He said that this funding was proffered a few years ago for two projects; one they had received proffers for a portion of it, and they expected to receive the rest within the next year or two. He said that however, the cost of traffic signals had increased in the past few years, so they would need to find additional funding to complete these projects.

Mr. Lehane said that the proposed projects were listed on the screen. He said that Resolution R25-68 was for revenue sharing, and R25-69 was for transportation alternatives. He said that both resolutions required them to add the additional TAP projects if the Board wished to include the Barrett Heights Road and Forbes Street sidewalk projects as well.

Mr. Lehane said that the proposed sidewalk projects totaled four, but only two were currently included in the resolutions. He said that these were the projects previously approved by the Board would start work on, and they had discussed them briefly at the work session. He said that the additional projects were not specifically added to the resolution, as they were still to be determined. He said that the recommendations from staff were based on the prioritization criteria from their Transportation Master Plan and the Smart Scale Program's land use metrics.

Ms. Bohmke asked if Mr. Lehane could elaborate on the addition of Barrett Heights and Forbes Street.

Mr. Lehane said that the project in question was the Forbes Street at Manning Drive and Falmouth Elementary School sidewalk project; VDOT was currently working on the Forbes Street and Harrell Road intersection realignment project, as part of their secondary six-year plan. He said that they were currently in the right-of-way stage, although they had experienced some delays, and were still aiming to complete the project within this year. He said that he would check with Mr. Bates to see if he could provide an update at the next quarterly report, which was scheduled for May.

Ms. Bohmke said that including Forbes Street and Manning Drive in the plan could be beneficial, especially considering the high concentration of families with children living nearby. She said that she wanted to confirm whether this inclusion would pose any issues.

Mr. Lehane said that the project for TAP and revenue sharing was one aspect of the discussion. He said that the connection to the north, to the townhome development, was one part of the project. He said that they were also working on a separate potential idea for a project to the south, which would serve the residential homes that already had a sidewalk.

Ms. Allen motioned, seconded by Dr. Yeung, to approve Proposed Resolution R25-68, including the Barrett Heights Road sidewalk project and the Forbes Street at Manning Drive and Falmouth Elementary School sidewalk project.

The Voting Board tally was:
Yea: (7) Allen, Bohmke, Diggs, English, Gary, Vanuch, Yeung
No: (0)

Ms. Allen motioned, seconded by Ms. Gary, to approve Proposed Resolution R25-69, with the addition of the two projects.

The Voting Board tally was:
Yea: (7) Allen, Bohmke, Diggs, English, Gary, Vanuch, Yeung
No: (0)

RECESS

The Board recessed at 6:28 p.m. and reconvened at 6:30 p.m.

PRESENTATIONS BY THE PUBLIC

Mr. Diggs read the rules for public comment.

Caitlin Goodale-Porter, Garrisonville District, said that she had discussed military education matters before, which was why she was there tonight. She said that before the Virginia military survivors' independence education issue gained significant attention last year, she had been working on the federal component, known as dependents' educational assistance, for several years.

Ms. Goodale-Porter said that there was a QR code available that provided access to documents and supporting materials. She said that recently, the attorney who had successfully convinced Congress in 1989 to establish the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims had agreed to lead a class action lawsuit on behalf of dual military families who had been incorrectly told by the federal government that it was double dipping for a child to have both a father and a mother. She said that this was a violation of U.S. law and had been the case for many years.

Ms. Goodale-Porter said that the court case of Osmond v. Peek was relevant here and was a federal, real, and binding decision. She said that Veterans Affairs (VA) should have been following this ruling for over 16 years, but instead, they had taken money away from both veteran parents, only allowing a child, in many cases, one set of benefits. She said that this was not only incorrect but also egregious.

Ms. Goodale-Porter said that the VA's actions had affected many dual military families, and they needed to fight back. She said that she wanted to emphasize that these were real federal judges, many of whom were retired, and she knew at least one who would be willing to testify before Congress about the significance of their decision. She said that they had many families in Stafford who were impacted by this issue. She said that families who used the Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program (VMSDEP) were typically also eligible to use Chapter 35. She said that this program must be administered in compliance with U.S. law, and not used as a secret slush fund.

Perry Garley said that he would like to bring two points to the Board's attention. He said that he attended a training session this morning, hosted by the Stafford County Public Safety Chaplains, and he would like to express his gratitude to them and the Fire Department for organizing it. He said that the chaplains do an outstanding job, not only supporting the Fire, EMS, and Sheriff departments, but also providing vital support to the residents of Stafford County during times of great distress.

Mr. Garley said that secondly he would like to discuss the budget. He said that as they will be setting the tax rate today, he respectfully requested that they maintain the same level as last year. He said that with the current rate, they can fully fund the schools. He said that there were efficiencies within the Stafford County schools and budget that can be explored to meet their obligations without increasing the tax budget.

Mr. Garley said that he was aware that some concerns had been raised about the cost of living for Stafford residents and seniors, and he believed that keeping the tax rate the same would help mitigate these concerns. He said that he appreciated the Board's support in this matter and reiterated his request to maintain the zero increase in the tax rate.

Darla Stencavage, Garrisonville District, said that she would like to ask the Board of Supervisors to reconsider the start time of their meetings. She said that the earlier time was restrictive to citizen involvement, especially now that they were returning to the office full-time. She said that as someone who used to work in the office two days a week, she found it challenging to attend meetings by 5:00 p.m., but she could adjust her work schedule.

Ms. Stencavage said that with the return to the office every day and the added complexity of Virginia Railway Express (VRE) schedules and business hours, it was now nearly impossible to make it to meetings by 5:00 p.m. She said that this was severely restricting citizen involvement.

She said that she would like to ask the Board to reconsider the time and push it back. She said that additionally, she would like to discuss the traffic study that was the first item on the agenda.

Ms. Stencavage said that it was disappointing to see that Buc-ee's information was used to develop the study. She said that Buc-ee's data was notoriously inaccurate, and the numbers VDOT had presented had been disputed. She said that the study had missed critical information, including missing traffic at intersections that were placed before or after them.

Ms. Stencavage said that furthermore, with everyone returning to the office full-time, this would significantly increase traffic numbers. She said that she had personally experienced this, as she used to have a dedicated VRE seat, but now she often had to share one, and the associated traffic on Courthouse Road to get to the VRE was already significant. She said that the traffic impact study really needed to be reevaluated.

Ms. Stencavage said that again, she wanted to express her concern that if they were already seeing intersections in the proposed Buc-ee's travel way that were operating over capacity, it was unthinkable that they would consider developing it. She said that furthermore, the impact on the hospital and surrounding intersections, which would require a level F of service, was particularly concerning given the minutes that mattered in emergency situations.

Ms. Stencavage said that finally, she was concerned that the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Economic Development Authority (EDA) did not include information on ensuring that the proposed location met the Stafford Vision 2040 standards. She said that the standards seemed to be at odds with the targeted industries and goals outlined on the EDA's page.

Julia Lewis, Falmouth District, said that she was a senior on a fixed income, so she was respectfully asking they to please not raise the taxes. She said that at their last meeting on March 4, five of them voted to extend applications for five businesses, despite clear indications from both Mr. Zuraf and Ms. Vanuch that some had failed to meet required deadlines by a long shot.

Ms. Lewis said that rather than evaluating each case individually based on its merits, they chose to vote to grant extensions en masse. She said that every single one of them sitting here had a college degree. She said that they all understood the importance of turning in their homework on time or face the consequences, and that should not be any different for developers. She said that their vote sent a message loud and clear—no developers left behind.

Ms. Lewis said that she recognized that Stafford County wanted to be open for business, but the real question was, on whose terms? She said that the cost of reapplying between $14,000 and $25,000 was cited as a major concern. She said that to the average person, that was a lot of money. She said that to developers overseeing a multi-million dollar budget, that was equivalent to an inconvenient $25 parking ticket—just another cost of doing business.

Ms. Lewis said that their vote had sent a clear signal that developers could skirt deadlines without consequence. She said that because a teacher could not grade a paper, this undermined the staff's efficiency to move projects through the system in a timely manner. She asked what incentive remained for applicants to follow the rules if they knew that the Board would extend deadlines because they wanted to be open for business. She asked who was really in charge. She asked if Stafford County would dictate the terms of development, or if they would be left groveling with their tails between their legs, allowing developers to run all over them.

Ms. Lewis said that large-scale developments brought increased demands for staff. She said that they needed to be open for police, fire, resources, and other essential County services, even if schools weren't a factor. She said that most of those developers should have been held accountable and clearly told, if they did not turn in their homework, they failed. She said that there must be consequences. She said that if developers did not respect deadlines, they should not be passed on because they did not earn it. She said that holding developers accountable was not going to chase them away; if it did, good riddance.

Ms. Lewis said that they needed developers who were willing to collaborate with them, rather than working against them. She said that she was in favor of working with developers who were interested in doing business there, but on the County's terms, not the developer's. She said that they were losing sight of the fact that they should be the ones calling the shots; she wondered if they needed to earn the right to be involved in these projects.

Jenni Soult, Rock Hill District, said that she spoke with them last month regarding the proposed real estate taxes. She said that last month, she shared with them the percent increases of some of her friends over the past three years, which ranged from 20% to 39%. She said that she was astonished by those numbers, which is why she brought them to their attention. She said that Stafford County, with a 6.7% population increase over the past three years, has seen a 25% to 30% increase in real estate taxes during the same period. She said that according to their website, the County Administrator's proposed tax rates will result in an average annual tax bill increase of $229, bringing the average tax bill to $4,329.

Ms. Soult said that if they calculate the math, that was a 5.6% increase for those with an average tax bill of $4,329 in just one year. She said that for her personally, this would result in a 31.3% tax increase from 2021 to now. She said that for her friends who experienced a 39% increase, this has put them over 40% for the past four years. She said that it was unsustainable. She said that they often discussed the need for teacher pay increases in this County, yet it was puzzling that they were making Stafford County unaffordable to them. She said that teachers have not received a 30% pay increase over the past four years.

Ms. Soult said that she certainly had not; neither had the Board. She said that she was wondering where this tax increase was going. She said that they cannot afford this. She said that before asking taxpayers to dig deeper into their pockets, the Board must ensure that every dollar was being spent wisely. She said that for example, they should consider if there were outdated programs that could be streamlined or no longer needed. She asked if they could negotiate better contracts with vendors, or if there were opportunities to consolidate services without sacrificing quality. She said that these were the concerns she would like the Board to address.

Ms. Soult said that cost-cutting does not have to mean slashing essential services like public safety or education. She said that it simply meant making smart, strategic decisions. She said that she was calling on the Board to thoroughly review every County expense with the same diligence that families were exercising to make ends meet, as the four-year tax surge had not only put a strain on their wallets, but also tested their trust in the Board to ensure that they were not simply paying for unnecessary waste.

Shannon Fingerholz, Hartwood District, said that today, she wanted to address the Board collectively, as a representative of the collective, rather than focusing on any one individual. She said that she wanted to start by offering an apology; she tended to show her emotions on her face and had become more relaxed over time, often making comments to who she was sitting with during the Board meetings. She said that these comments were usually not about the person speaking; however, from the outside, it may seem like they were reacting to the speakers.

Ms. Fingerholz said that she had seen all the Board members do the same thing, so she asked they extend grace to fellow elected officials and County employees when they, too, had moments of being human. She said that if they felt there was an issue, please address it one-on-one, allowing for a conversation rather than a one-sided accusation. She asked that they avoid making petty comments; they had enough issues to address. She said that she would like to remind the Board that they were welcome at their Board meetings, and they would appreciate their presence.

Ms. Fingerholz said that regarding the tax rate, she agreed with many of the concerns expressed. She said that it was clear that something had gone awry, and they were now playing catch-up, which always hurt and cost more. She said that these conversations were real and valid. She said that their seniors and income-strained neighbors faced extremely limited options, and by not exploring these options in earnest, it appeared that it was more important to use them as justifications for not changing the rate, which ultimately benefited a younger, higher-income resident with more land ownership.

Ms. Fingerholz said that if they truly wanted to look out for their older and economically disadvantaged neighbors, they as a County should pursue age-in-place tax caps for their seniors and disabled residents. She said that additionally, they should examine adjusting the tax relief rules. She said that capping income at $35,000 and $40,000 for partial or complete relief, respectively, was quite low in their economy.

Ms. Fingerholz said that furthermore, the application deadline of April 1, before the actual tax rate was voted on, created a problem. She said that they had made adjustments in the past, including those in 2021, which were small but acknowledged the necessity. She said that she understood the process, and she appreciated the thought process that two smart women had taught her, which was relevant here.

Ms. Fingerholz said that one of them had said it was not a question of either or; it was an and. She said that they could balance the County's needs with the needs of those who required assistance. She said that while there may be consequences, it was worth having the conversation and working towards a solution. She said that just because there were consequences did not mean they should stop looking for a solution. She said that the other woman had advised them not to just say no, but to say yes – to find a way to make it work. She said that they could make this a reality. She said that they could find a way to balance both decisions and help their community at the same time.

Hank Scharpenberg, Aquia District, said that Stafford County was facing a significant budget deficit, a shortfall that County taxpayers would struggle to fill in the near term. He said that this crisis had at least three contributing causes. He said that the multi-million dollar unfunded disabled veterans property tax exemption, unchecked residential growth, largely due to residential rezoning requests that were approved without requiring infrastructure offsets from developers, and a large influx of students requiring English language instruction, many of whom were likely the children of undocumented immigrants enabled by the policies of the previous administration. He said that addressing this budgetary shortfall over time would require a concerted effort by the County Supervisors and the School Board.

Mr. Scharpenberg said that first, he recommended that they stop approving residential rezoning requests unless they included substantial offsets to the demand on County infrastructure. He said that this was because additional homes created increased demand for services, particularly education. He said that second, he urged them to seriously expand Stafford's business tax base. He said that if a potential business did not negatively impact their residential quality of life, it should be encouraged and expeditiously approved by streamlining the planning and approval process.

Mr. Scharpenberg said that every tax dollar the business community provided was one less that they must extract from homeowners. He said that third, he suggested that they take a hard look at the specifics of the School Board's budget request. He said that with over 5,000 employees to educate 32,000 students, it appeared that the organization was top-heavy, with too many administrators and Supervisors being well-compensated at the expense of teachers who were inadequately paid for their work.

Mr. Scharpenberg said that he recommended that they consider consolidating services with County government. Did they really need two budget and finance departments, two personnel departments, and two planning departments. He said that both the County and school system had unique requirements that necessitated unique skill sets, but there were tremendous opportunities to share services, saving taxpayers money that could be applied to core educational needs.

Mr. Scharpenberg said that finally, he encouraged them to engage elected state officials at every opportunity and impress upon them the criticality of state funds to offset Stafford's revenue lost due to the disabled veterans property tax relief mandate. He said that they should be reminded that the voters cared and voters remembered. He said that fixing the budgetary hole would require sustained effort and innovative approaches by the County government and school administration.

Molly Denham, Hartwood District said that she would like to start by thanking the County Administrator for the great presentation he gave earlier this month. She said that however, she would like to add a few points to the discussion and provide more context regarding the median income. She said that according to the data, the median household income in Stafford County is $133,792. She said that it was essential to note that this was household income, not individual income. She said that therefore, the median income for a single individual, it was roughly $66,000, and not every household has a two-person income, so not everyone has a partner to make it affordable to live in Stafford County.

Ms. Denham said that she would like to emphasize the importance of affordable workforce housing within the County. She said that she was here today to discuss the tax rate, as she would be traveling for spring break and would not be able to attend the public hearing. She said that the scheduled date was not intentional, but she did think it was not well thought out either. She said that she was here to advocate for the County Administrator's recommended tax rate of $0.9436. She said that in addition, she urged the County to fully fund the School Board's requested budget.

Ms. Denham said that Mr. Ashton had proposed a solution that would result in an average of $19 per household per month increase. She stated that $10 of that amount would be dedicated to the schools. She said that this would mean 52% of all money earned on real estate taxes for the schools. She said that she fully supported this; however, historical data shows that the County spends only 23% of the County-earned income on schools, after stripping out state and federal funding. She said that this meant that schools would receive $3.80 for every $19. She said that she would love to see the schools receive $10 of that amount, and she believed this was a more equitable distribution of funds.

Ms. Denham said that she had more to say, but she would like to add something else to deviate from her script. She said that she was extremely disappointed by the number of people in Stafford County who continue to assume that the English-learning language children in their community were undocumented immigrants. She said that they were forgetting that they have a significant influx of Middle Eastern refugees. She said that having visited these countries, she took great offense to anyone who disparaged these brave parents who brought their children here to this County in search of a better life. She said that she was extremely tired of others who lacked the same heart and compassion.

Renee Kendall, George Washington District, said that she would like to propose no increase in their taxes. She said that she believed that with their current tax rates, they could still accomplish the necessary tasks. She said that their taxes had increased by 31.5% over the past three years, as they were aware. She said that as a senior living in a 55-plus community, she had seen firsthand the impact of rising taxes.

Ms. Kendall said that she had moved to Fredericksburg from Montgomery County, Maryland, in 2001, seeking lower taxes, a better quality of life, and less congestion. She said that she was drawn to the area's rural charm and rich history. She said that she watched as a beautiful farm with cows in the pasture was transformed into Central Park.

Ms. Kendall said that she was not opposed to growth and she knew it would happen anywhere one went. She said that she spoke with individuals who had lived in Fredericksburg their entire lives, and they expressed concerns about the sustainability of their tax rates. She said that she knew of a family who would be moving because they could not afford to stay. She said that she did not move to Fredericksburg to see it become another Northern Virginia. She said that she grew up in Montgomery County, Maryland, and she stated that she would never live in Northern Virginia.

Ms. Kendall said that Fredericksburg was distinct from northern Virginia; it was central Virginia. She said that as seniors, they had worked hard to save and plan for their retirement, so that they could support themselves without becoming a burden to society. She said that if they continued to be taxed at the rates they were increasing, it would deplete their savings and force them to rely on the tax budget to care for themselves, ultimately becoming a burden to society. She said that regarding their schools, she had a degree in elementary education. She said that unfortunately, she did not become a teacher as she had initially planned.

Ms. Kendall said that after going through a divorce and becoming a single parent, she needed a more stable income, which led her to pursue a career as a legal secretary. She said that her granddaughter, who was also a teacher, often sought assistance with funding supplies for her students. She said that she found it puzzling, given that half of their budget was allocated to the schools. She said that she would like to respectfully request that they be mindful of their financial resources and budget.

Dave Kendall, George Washington District, said that he resided in Celebrate Virginia after living in northern Virginia. He said that he could tell them about the outcome of the process. He said that as someone who worked with the Intel community and OSD, he had observed a lot about what was going on. He said that if the director of the agency wanted to move resources to a different program, he would receive a call from higher up asking which program would suffer. He said that as a result, people were aware of what was happening.

Mr. Kendall said that he tried to understand this process himself, and he was happy living in Celebrate, playing pickleball, and enjoying life. He said that he did not pay much attention to the School Board or the Board of Supervisors until a couple of years ago. He said that someone told him that he needed to get involved because they would raise his real estate tax.

Mr. Kendall said that it had happened. He said that the tax on his home went from $3,300 to $4,300. He said that in northern Virginia, the taxes on the house he sold to move here were $7,500, and now they were $10,000. He said that if the houses had not appreciated, the tax rate would have been raised. He said that if they had appreciated, the tax rate would have been lowered to make more money than needed. He said that however, the bottom line was that it was just a game.

Mr. Kendall said that the game was still ongoing, and he knew this from attending a School Board meeting. He said that in his view, the budget was created, and then it was passed across the street, which was considered full funding. He said that they needed full funding, and he wanted the schools to be good. He said that however, he did not know how they could make a decision about how much to allocate. He said that when they decided to give them 5% or 4% more money, he wondered how they determined that amount.

Mr. Kendall said that he questioned the logic behind the decision-making for what to allocate. He said that when they lacked specific information, they made an educated guess, often referencing inflation rates or attempting to minimize the impact on a particular group. He said that this process seemed arbitrary and not based on concrete data. He said that from his perspective, and he wished there was a more transparent process, it would be ideal to pause or reconsider tax rate increases until they had a better understanding of the school budget.

Mr. Kendall said that he would like to know if there was any accountability mechanism in place to ensure that excess funds were not being misused. He said that as someone who personally struggled with the effects of tax increases, he would like to be able to confidently support full funding without knowing the outcome, which was often not the case in his household.

Melissa Scheiman, Garrisonville District, said that she was the president of the Homeowner's Association (HOA) of Autumn Ridge. She said that she was here this evening regarding the property transfer they had discussed. She said that they would like to transfer their sport court area to the County Parks and Recreation department. She said that she would also like to extend their gratitude to Brion Southall, who had been an invaluable resource to them over the past year. She said that although he had retired, his guidance had been instrumental in their efforts.

Ms. Scheiman said that she would also like to thank Dr. Yeung, who had been a tremendous supporter, attending their meetings and providing valuable input. She said that to achieve this transfer, the HOA had required a two-thirds majority of all homeowners' signatures. She said that they had obtained 220 signatures, with all board members serving as notaries to ensure the signatures were properly authenticated.

Ms. Scheiman said that this represented an overwhelming 70% approval rate, with only eight homeowners opposing the transfer. She said that this was a testament to the strong support within their community. She said that as they were currently on the agenda, she kindly requested that they consider their initiative. She said that the proffer amendment application was a crucial step in this process, as it addressed the proffer requirements. She said that they were eager to move forward with this transfer and appreciated the Board's consideration.

Michael Parkyn, Garrisonville District, said that tonight, he would like to share three truths that every Supervisor needs to tell. He said that to begin, he would like to draw a comparison to the Borough of Glen Ridge, New Jersey. He said that this small town, with 7,500 residents, 2,500 households, and 1,800 students in K-12 schools, had a median household income in the low six figures and a median property value of over half a million dollars.

Mr. Parkyn said that Glen Ridge had its own schools, EMS, and police force, with the exception that it had almost no business. He said that the median annual property tax was $25,000, which was necessary to maintain the town's services. He said that the Board members might be thinking they cannot charge that much. He said that however, truth number one was that they needed more tax revenue, either from personal property taxes or business taxes, to support their services.

Mr. Parkyn said that they may believe they adhered to sound fiscal principles, but several years ago, they used COVID grants to give Sheriff's deputies a pay raise, temporarily avoiding the need to raise the property tax rate by $0.02. He said that however, those grants had expired, and the Supervisors who led that charge for use of those grants now did not want to tell their constituents the second truth: they now needed to pay those raises out of hide.

Mr. Parkyn said that one Supervisor wants to keep the taxes level and take the difference from the favorite target, Stafford County Public Schools. He said that last week, that same Supervisor convinced her party to compel two other Supervisors to swear to the same course of action. He said that 70 mostly unelected party loyalists handcuffing Supervisors so that no reasonable compromise could take place, no meaningful dialogue, no ability to take into account the wishes of the 54,000 voting constituents from their three districts.

Mr. Parkyn said that they knew who they were and knew what they were being asked to do. He said that they knew it was not right. He said that this has gone too far. He said that they need three truths tonight: Stafford needs more revenue, they need to pay for the Sheriff's raise but not from Stafford County Public Schools, and it was time for integrity over party loyalty.

Dale Jones, Garrisonville District, said that he was part of the Autumn Ridge HOA respectfully requested that the Board review the matter and approve the transfer of property for their sport courts. He said that one of the reasons the land was initially proffered to Autumn Ridge was that it was intended to be a private area. He said that however, it had proven to be impractical due to its location at the corner of Eustis. He said that they did not want to deny anyone access to the land, but they believed it would be better for the County to take over, as they were unable to fund and maintain it properly.

Mr. Jones said that they also envisioned opportunities for the land that would be best as a public use, which would enhance its value and attract additional resources and people. He said that he would like to thank Mr. Southall for his assistance on this matter, as he had provided valuable insights and walked the entire parcel of land with them. He said that he appreciated Dr. Yeung's support, as she had attended their board meetings and listened to their concerns. He said that they kindly requested that the Board review this matter and consider taking over the proffered land.

William Stewart, George Washington District, said that he was respectfully requesting that Supervisors advertise a tax rate with no increase for next year, maintaining the same rate as this past year. He said that due to the significant impact of COVID on his wife's and his income, their retirement income from individual retirement arrangements (IRA), Social Security, and a small commercial real estate investment had been severely reduced. He said that unfortunately, their income had remained nearly unchanged since 2019, averaging the same over the past five years.

Mr. Stewart said that meanwhile, all expenses except for their home mortgage had increased, including their Stafford real estate tax. He said that he understood that the County's costs also rose with inflation, and he appreciated the efforts to manage budgets. He said that he firmly believed that Supervisors and school committees must make necessary cuts, likely some painful ones. He said that until Stafford generated more revenue from industrial and commercial properties, such as a data centers, the County would need to operate with extreme fiscal discipline.

Mary Hanson, Falmouth District, said that she was strongly opposed to any tax increase. She said that many in the County lived on a fixed income, and the recent increases in Social Security and Medicare had already put a strain on family budgets. She said that the 2.5% increase in Social Security, down from 3.2% last year, and the 5.8% increase in Medicare, were significant challenges for families trying to make ends meet. She said that given the existing deficit in family budgets, reviewing and adjusting the family budget to accommodate a tax increase would be difficult. She said that this was why she was firmly against a tax increase.

Ms. Hanson said that if families were expected to cut costs to balance their budgets, then the County should also be expected to do the same. She said that she was again requesting an independent audit of the County budget, with a detailed line-by-line review of the School Board budget over the last five years, including actual expenditures. She said that this was a reasonable request, especially since the School Board budget accounted for the largest portion of the County's budget.

Ms. Hanson said that it was not enough to simply have a balanced budget; there was a fiduciary responsibility to be good stewards of taxpayers' money. She said that hardworking individuals, who had contributed to the County through their daily commutes, overtime, and other sacrifices, deserved to know that their money was being used efficiently. She said that she urged they to review the actual expenditures and costs of the School Board budget over the past five years, and identify areas where cuts could be made based on past performance. She said that this scrutiny was necessary to ensure that the County was using its resources effectively and efficiently.

Deanna Fisher, Garrisonville District, said that she requested that the current rate be advertised, without any tax increases. She said that the tax burden on Stafford residents had increased by 31.5% over the last three years, and many citizens were already struggling to make ends meet. She said that with the federal government finding increasing amounts of fraud and waste, and with many Stafford residents possibly losing their federal jobs, people were becoming more mindful of cutting wasteful spending and finding ways to get more done with less money, expecting the same of the Board of Supervisors.

Ms. Fisher said that many retired homeowners and renters were on fixed incomes and could lose their homes if taxes went any higher. She said that higher taxes were not feasible this year, and the negative impact on Stafford would be too great. She said that she urged the School Board and the entire County to thoroughly review their budgets and provide a detailed breakdown of all budget line items. She said that she requested that the School Board provide full disclosure regarding their decision to keep the DEI Advisory Committee despite the President's Executive Order and the Federal Department of Education's direction to eliminate all DEI-related activities by February 28, 2025.

Ms. Fisher said that it was unacceptable to risk losing federal funding, which was $43.5 million, or 11% of the budget, just a couple of years ago. She asked why residents should pay higher taxes when the School Board was actively working to lose that funding. She said that accountability and transparency were lacking. She said that she spoke out because she cared about schools and the education of all students, and she wanted the best for her community.

Ms. Fisher said that simply increasing funding did not necessarily mean better education; it was the responsible use of existing resources that truly mattered. She said that she was addressing the Board of Supervisors and the School Board. She said that in order to put aside personal agendas and conflicts, and prioritize the needs of Stafford, they required common sense and a long-term perspective. She said that the path of increasing taxes year after year was unsustainable.

Shamgar Connors, Hartwood District, said that he would address some of the arguments and statements he had been hearing regarding the concerns about raising taxes. He said that specifically, he had been hearing School Board members say that people did not want to fund the schools and that they did not care about the safety of their children. He said that however, he had never heard anyone say that.

Mr. Connors said that he did not appreciate being misquoted. He said that what people were asking for was a review of the current budget and receipts to identify areas of unnecessary spending and reallocate funds to meet the School Board's needs. He that however, the School Board claimed that everything was transparent and a public record. He said that the issue was that while the line items in the budget were publicly available, obtaining receipts for specific expenditures required a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request, which could be time-consuming and costly.

Mr. Connors said that this created a barrier to accessing information about how taxpayer dollars were being spent. He said that furthermore, the School Board's defense of the DEI committee, despite the clear executive order to eliminate it and risk losing federal funding, was concerning. He said that Stafford received $44 million in federal funding annually, and it was unclear what the School Board's justification was for not addressing this issue. He said that consulting with attorneys was not a free service, and taxpayers bore the cost, estimated to be around $300 to $500 per hour.

Mr. Connors said that the School Board was essentially betting $44 million on a gamble that they would not lose the money. He said that he would suggest an alternative solution: eliminating the DEI committee, as it appeared unnecessary. He said that given the School Board's willingness to risk $44 million, he questioned their ability to balance a budget. He said that the School Board's claim that they did not want to raise taxes and instead asked the Board of Supervisors to cover school funding was misleading. He said that they had requested a $500 million increase.

Mr. Connors said that it was unclear how they expected this to be achieved without lowering taxes or implementing other cost-cutting measures. The School Board's actions seemed designed to deceive the public, and he believed they were intentionally misleading and gaslighting parents and residents. He said that he was calling out this dishonesty, urging the School Board to be transparent and conduct a thorough review of their budget before considering a tax hike. He said that a third-party audit and examination of receipts would be a good starting point. He said that ultimately, he believed the School Board should prioritize finding cost-saving measures before raising taxes.

Susan Depp, Hartwood District, said she was very concerned about the tax relief programs available in the County. She said as the widow of an active duty service member, she had been studying these programs for three or four years and was familiar with them. She said although she now qualified for the program, she had not filed for it. She said she had reviewed a significant amount of information and had also submitted corrections to the Commissioner of the Revenue's Office through their online portal, as their website contained incorrect information.

Ms. Depp said there were numerous issues, and she was unsure where to begin. She said the 100% disability exemption must be permanent and total, according to the Constitution, State Code, County Code, and guidelines issued by the Virginia Department of Veterans Services. She said however, she had seen this Board state that it did not have to be. She said the exemptions that were allowed were limited, and driveways, fences, and swimming pools could not be exempted.

Ms. Depp said yet, Stafford County was exempting these items, while other counties were not. She said this inconsistency led her to discover that other counties, such as Spotsylvania, were not exempting these items. She said this was why Delegate Phillip Scott had submitted a bill to the General Assembly, requesting that exemptions be granted for driveways. She said she had discovered these exemptions while researching the issue, and she was concerned that they were exempting their veterans from paying for these items. She said as someone who also benefited from this program, she was troubled by the discrepancy.

Ms. Depp said she would greatly appreciate it if the Commissioner of Revenue were to suspend approvals immediately and hire an independent third-party auditor to review the applications, tax bills, and exemptions. She said this would ensure that they were not exempting things that they should not be. She said she hoped that someone would take action on this, as she was not aware of the process or how it typically worked. She said that the Elderly and Disabled Tax Relief was not limited to 1 acre; they were allowed 10 acre, so the Disabled Veterans Tax Relief should not be limited to 1 acre.

Ms. Depp said that they needed an ordinance to limit the elderly tax relief to 1 acre so the veterans' exemptions could also be limited to 1 acre. She said that it worked both ways; they were exempting things that should not and including things they should exempt. She said that she believed that this aspect of the process did not receive the same level of scrutiny from the state, as it did not involve payments to the state.

Sherry Quaresma, Widewater District, said that she wondered if the Board of Supervisors was supportive of the Stafford County School District being ranked 117th in terms of funding, despite being one of the wealthiest in the County. She said that she had heard that they were often ranked as the fifth wealthiest, so she did not understand how that translated to their funding. She said that she was hoping to hear the Supervisors' thoughts on this matter and any aspirations they may have for improving that funding situation.

Ms. Quaresma said that she was not suggesting that throwing more money at the schools would automatically solve all their problems. She said that she had a great deal of respect for their seniors and her taxes, which had doubled over the 13 years she had lived in Stafford. She said that she was on both sides of the fence, as she could see from her green shirt. She said that she did not want her taxes to go up, but she made $30 per hour with 17 years of experience, so it did not seem right. She said that she believed that their schools deserved better than 117th in the state.

Ms. Quaresma said that she was concerned that their seniors may not fully understand the challenges that their schools faced in 2025, particularly in light of the changes brought about by COVID. She said that the behavior of middle school students had changed dramatically, and she worried that their senior citizens may not be aware of the difficulties that their schools were facing.

Ms. Quaresma said that additional funding was necessary due to the concerning number of vaping incidents, multiple ambulance visits, and instances of students and staff requiring medical attention due to health concerns. She said that a student had told her to get out of his face when she told him to go back to class during class time. She said that this highlighted the need for improved supervision and support for students. She said that in her opinion, based on her 13 years of experience working at this school in Stafford, student behavior had deteriorated significantly. She said that to effectively address these issues, they required additional staff, more resources, and lower student-to-teacher ratios.

Vicki Lindberg, Falmouth District, said that she would like to discuss smart growth and data centers, particularly in light of their conversations this evening. She said that it was clear that tax revenue was a significant issue. She said that data centers could generate $18 million in tax revenue per square foot. She said that however, she wanted to emphasize they must not allow data center development in residential areas in order to maintain a positive quality of life in the County. She said that at their community meeting, they discussed proffers for noise reduction, historical preservation, and other concerns, but the fact remained that the site was 160 feet from the closest house. She said that at some point, they needed to balance the quality of life with the need for additional tax revenue.

Bart Randall, Garrisonville District, said that he wanted to address a couple of points. He said that they had mentioned last week that they should consider extending the time for some of those companies, and he agreed with Ms. Vanuch that they could not have carte blanche agreements. He said that each company should be evaluated on an individual basis, taking into account mitigating factors. He said that he was concerned about how long they were willing to let this situation continue and how many extensions they could allow developers to have for a project to get done.

Mr. Randall said that he believed they needed to establish parameters for these extensions, as they were currently working with them. He said that they wanted to be in their County, and they should be accountable to them, not the other way around. He said that additionally, he wanted to revisit the discussion on revenue. He said that the Administrator had presented data last week, showing that 70% of their revenue came from residents. He said that he wanted to see the breakdown for businesses, which could be in the range of 20% to 25%.

Mr. Randall said that a healthy County probably generated 50% of its revenue from businesses. He said that it was no wonder that they struggled with taxes, as the majority of taxes came from residents, not businesses. He said that in comparison, Prince William, Fairfax, and Loudoun counties had a significantly higher tax base from businesses.

Mr. Randall said that to get their County to a healthier financial state, they could not rely solely on resident taxes; it must be on businesses. He said that however, until they achieved this, they would continue to rely on the backs of their residents. He thought they needed to do something about this issue because the County got its growth and revenue from businesses.

Mr. Randall said that they should be doing everything they could to support them and ensure they understood they were part of their timeline and they needed to work together. He said that he appreciated the comments about the three-year tax rates, and he agreed that he paid them just like everyone else. He said that however, he would also like to see the numbers for five-year and ten-year rates, as well as the trends over the past ten and five years.

Mr. Randall said that it was easy to pick and choose when the numbers aligned with their message. He said that nobody wanted to say it, but they needed to consider a revenue sharing with the schools. He said that if they had a clear agreement that outlined the percentage each party received, they could move forward. He said that they could sign the agreement, hand over the funds, and focus on building the County. He said that the other counties north of them already had a revenue sharing model in place, and that was where they needed to go to make this work.

Marlene Larson, Hartwood District, said that tonight she was speaking about a Stafford County issue that affects her personally. She said that as a concerned citizen and dog owner, she was here to share her story about the negligence of a local business. She said that Woof Houze, a local dog training facility, had been battling the effects of airborne silica dust infiltrating their building, which poses a serious health hazard. She said that her dog, Glenny, has suffered firsthand due to this negligence. She said that she had adopted Glenny as a puppy, wanting to give her the best life possible, and when she found Woof Houze, she was thrilled.

Ms. Larson said that it was a place where her dog could socialize, exercise, and thrive. She said that however, soon after she started attending their Musselman Road location, she noticed something was wrong. She said that within two weeks, Glenny developed a persistent cough, leading to multiple vet visits and medications. She said that she also suffered from severe diarrhea, waking her up every two hours at night, for weeks. She said that the cost of vet bills, worry, stress, and pain were incredibly overwhelming. She said that she tried adjusting Glenny's routine, changing her food, and cutting out treats, but nothing helped.

Ms. Larson said that then she noticed a clear pattern: when Glenny did not attend Woof Houze, she got better; when she returned, the symptoms came back. She said that it was not until Woof Houze moved to the Emancipation Highway facility that she saw undeniable proof that she had not had a single episode since.

Ms. Larson said that the situation was urgent. She said that the presence of airborne silica dust is making dogs and people sick, and it was absolutely unacceptable that a business in their community was being harmed due to the negligence of another. She said that this was not just about Wolf House; it was about protecting pets like hers, the staff who work there, and the people who depend on their service.

Ms. Larson said that she urged the Board to take immediate action, hold the responsible business accountable, and ensure that this never happened again. She said that her dog suffered for months, and no other pet or person should have to endure this. She said that as of today, the Musselman Road facility remains closed while the other business continues to operate.

Ms. Larson said that she was not an expert, but she had been trying to learn more about this issue. She said that to put this into perspective, she was holding a small packet of Splenda, which weighs one gram. She said that this packet would provide an entire football stadium filled with people with 40,000 times the amount of silica dust allowed by Occupational Safety and Health Administration’s (OSHA) current regulations.

Ms. Larson said that yesterday, she drove by the Musselman location and observed that the entire garage connected to the other business was covered in a thick layer of white dust on the pavement. She said that she had a few pictures she could share with the Board as well. She said that she was concerned about the safety implications of this situation and the potential risks it posed to people and the environment.

Gabby Gibson said that she was an employee of Woof Houze and had been greatly affected by what happened with the silica poisoning. She said that when this incident occurred, she was greatly exposed along with her coworkers, and she ended up with fluid in her lungs. She said that she visited the hospital and underwent an x-ray, which revealed the issue. She said that the medical team ran a wide range of tests to rule out any other potential causes.

Ms. Gibson said that as a result, she was unable to attend work properly, care for her dog, and lost money and time. She said that this incident had a significant impact on her school life, forcing her to stop working and participating in sports, including co-ed soccer and co-ed softball, as well as regularly hiking. She said that another consequence was that she now had to use an inhaler, which she had not had to use since middle school. She said that she was currently earning her second college degree.

Adia Washington, owner of Woof Houze, said that she was speaking to the Board of Supervisors again as a frustrated small business owner in Stafford County. She said that she wanted to express her growing anger and concern regarding the ongoing challenges they faced.

She said that the emotional toll this situation has taken on her mental health was severe, and the financial strain continued to drain her resources day by day.

Ms. Washington said that it was disheartening to witness the corruption within their County, where those in power seem to turn a blind eye. She said that the challenges she outlined last meeting have not only persisted but worsened, leaving her in a precarious position with her business and the livelihoods of her employees hanging on by a thread. She said that she had reached out multiple times for an update, but the silence was deafening.

Ms. Washington said that after their last conversation, she felt a glimmer of hope that change was possible, but now it was radio silence. She said that she did receive an email after their meeting, and she asked about the violating business on County codes and policies. She said that she found it unacceptable that the violating business could continue to profit while they suffer. She said that she was concerned about the lack of transparency regarding the status of this business, despite claims from code enforcement officers that they have no recollection of it. She said that she was surprised to learn that the County had no recollection of this business, despite an approved electrical permit on file from 2017.

Ms. Washington said that this was not just a simple issue; it was a significant health hazard affecting not only her business but also surrounding enterprises and their employees. She said that the silica exposure from this business had likely caused health issues for many, and the public deserved to be informed. She said that it was well-documented that inhaling silica particles could permanently adhere to the lungs, making removal impossible.

Ms. Washington said that silicosis, a lung disease caused by inhaling silica dust, could develop within weeks of exposure. She said that the severity of exposure, which they were in the building for seven months, can lead to a range of symptoms, including a hacking cough, wheezing, nausea, weight loss, and shortness of breath. She said that high exposure to silica, particularly in a crystalline form, can also cause flu-like symptoms, such as headaches, fever, and other respiratory issues.

Ms. Washington said that further investigation was necessary to ensure that code enforcement officers were fulfilling their responsibilities. She said that their records and decisions required scrutiny to confirm that they were properly addressing violations and enforcing the laws in place. She said that this lack of accountability was a critical component of the corruption that affected them all. She said that in 43 days, Woof Houze would be no more.

Steve Schwartz, Aquia District, said that in the past three years, the tax burden had increased by 31% Countywide, with varying rates across districts. He said that as someone who had lived in the area for three and a half years, he had witnessed his mortgage rising significantly each year, primarily due to this.

Mr. Schwartz said that he wanted to express his gratitude to Supervisors Bohmke, Vanuch, and English, who had agreed to keep rates flat and brought common sense to the budget. He said that however, he wanted to see a line item account of spending before they added to the budget. He said that specifically, he was concerned about the School Board budget, which he had reviewed. He said that he believed it was essential to see a detailed breakdown of spending, including the scope of work and pricing for contracts.

Mr. Schwartz said that fiscal responsibility was a common sense concept that they should be able to expect. He said that he was puzzled by the lack of transparency regarding lawn care services and furniture expenses. He said that he wanted to know how the contract had been advertised, how the contractor had been selected, and what the scope of work and pricing had been based on industry standards. In the past, more money had been cited as the solution, rather than the problem.

Mr. Schwartz said that he urged fiscal responsibility and transparency. He said that regarding the English as a second language program, he wanted to examine the specifics. He asked how many refugees had arrived in their country due to a crisis or disaster created by the previous administration. He asked how many were undocumented immigrants. He asked how many were seeking to develop their skills, and how many were American citizens. He said that he recognized the need for the program, but he questioned whether they needed 36 English as a second language teachers.

Mr. Schwartz said that if they were going to allocate more funds, they must scrutinize their existing spending. He said that as someone who had worked with interpreters from Afghanistan, who had earned the privilege of becoming American citizens, he believed they should accommodate those who desired to become citizens. He said that he did not know anyone who did not speak good English, so it was a development that needed to happen. He said that however, they needed to be specific and discreet about how they approached this and utilized the money they already had.

Kristen Maxson, Falmouth District, said that she would like to address the decision to push the budget hearing to March 25, which coincides with spring break. She said that this may result in reduced participation, and it was unfortunate that it fell on a day when the Board of Supervisors typically holds a workday meeting, which was essential for working on the budget and the information presented today.

Ms. Maxson said that unfortunately, this meeting would not be an opportunity to bring in additional thoughts or feedback. She said that today, they were discussing the Capital Project Transportation Courthouse targeted development area and transportation study. She said that she appreciated a Board member's question about why this project was being brought forward now, rather than earlier, when they had the opportunity to review and provide feedback on the transportation plan.

Ms. Maxson said that this was a significant change, and it affected Mine Road, which connected to the new roads, where numerous changes were taking place. She said that the people had wanted their courthouse back, and it had been relocated, only to be moved again. She said that there were many changes happening, and if one had not been following the developments, it was essential to be aware of them.

Ms. Maxson said that the new roads had not been previously announced, and this would be costly. She said that the courthouse targeted development area (TDA) encompassed 2,580 acres, roughly the size of the Crow’s Nest conservation area. She said that they were familiar with the high costs, and the recovery, restoration, and regain efforts would be substantial.

Ms. Maxson said that the budget for 2022 was substantial, and the 2025 budget could be tampered down some. She said that they were essentially taking from one source to fund another, but the second source, the 3% tax rate, was being saved through rezoning. She said that however, this was not a solution because the zoning process was extremely complicated. She said that she had a suggestion for TARGET: Transitional Area Redeeming Grantor Economic Transfer.

Alane Callender, Falmouth District, said that Mr. Schwartz's comments had gotten her blood boiling enough to bring her here to express her support for their public schools. She said that she had lived in the County since 1980 and had seen her son graduate from Stafford High School in 2000. She said that during his time in school, Stafford County was contributing 70% of the County budget to schools. She said that that contribution had decreased significantly over the years, and it was now proposed to be 52%.

Ms. Callendar said that she did not want to pay higher taxes, but she also understood the dire situation their schools were in, and she believed it was important that they support their schools and work to restore their reputation. She said that they used to be the best school system in the region and had a much higher ranking statewide, so they were in a bad place. She said that she also wanted to express her support for the English as a second language program, which was extremely important. She said that they should show compassion to those who had come to their community seeking a better life.

Vera Ward said that there were 43 days until Woof Houze would be no more. She said that in just 43 days, Adia's life work could be lost. She said that she had placed her trust in the owner of the property in the Stafford County area, as well as the property management company in this County, and the code enforcement officers in this County.

Ms. Ward said that the trust that led to this place had, unfortunately, led to a place of unemployment, debt, and a lack of purpose. She said that in just 43 days, they would no longer be able to call Woof Houze home. She said that in just 43 days, they would no longer be able to help the voiceless dogs who were discriminated against because of their breeds, like hers.

Ms. Ward said that in 43 days, they would no longer be able to save aggressive dogs from euthanasia because they were misunderstood. She said that in 43 days, they would no longer be able to support dogs in need by leading with love, trust, and respect. She said that unlike some counterparts in the area who used pain, force, and fear, Woof Houze had chosen to use love.

Ms. Ward said that in just 43 days, their space would be gone. She said that this was not just a business closure; it was the loss of a community that loved animals and relied on them. She said that she was deeply troubled by the false statements made by Stafford County to the Potomac Local News, which only served to deflect responsibility from the County.

She said that she urged that the Board take action, hold the property owners responsible, and the other parties accountable as well. She said that she stood here with small businesses in mind, asking that they consider the owners who were struggling to survive. She asked that they please know that Woof Houze would prevail by any means necessary. She said that she implored the Board to listen, engage, and act because Woof Houze's future depended on it.

James Fisher, Garrisonville District, said that 117 was just a data point. He said that he had previously discussed other data points. He said that he mentioned a County that spends the least amount of money on education per student in the state, yet ranks 11th in SOL scores. He said that he also shared an example of a County that spends $8,000 more per student than Stafford County, with SOL test scores that are only slightly better.

Mr. Fisher said that this means they now had four data points to consider. He said that simply throwing more money at the problem would not fix it. He said that there was a reason for Stafford County's SOL test scores, and he was willing to bet it was not solely due to increased funding. He said that this was not the main topic he would like to discuss tonight.

Mr. Fisher said that this forum format did not allow for a back-and-forth exchange. He said that they had three-minute increments for public comments, and then a brief response from the Board. He said that he would like to request that each member look the public in the eye and honestly state that they had thoroughly reviewed the departments' budgets and that everything in those budgets is more important than the impact of raising the tax rate on County citizens. He said that if they could not do that, he did not see justification for raising the advertised tax rate.

Justin Thacker, George Washington District, said that he wanted to start by saying he was sorry to Jennifer, the purchasing agent, for his previous comment about the bid being rigged. He said that he used a poor choice of words, and he thought she was doing a difficult job, which affected him personally since he was in the County.

Mr. Thacker said that he should have admitted when he was wrong. He said that as the old man would say, part of being a man is acknowledging when one was wrong, and that was the wrong thing to say. He said that despite his mistake, Jennifer was kind and invited him to discuss the issue. He said that they had a good conversation, and he thought that was essential. He said that the bids were audited, and she took the time to educate him on the process. He said that he appreciated her efforts.

Mr. Thacker said that as a taxpaying citizen in Stafford County, putting aside the business aspect, he wanted to express his concern about the recent tax hikes, which had been challenging for property owners like himself. He said that a person earlier mentioned that they had a friend who rented a property and did not feel the impact of the tax hike. He said that since they did not own property in the County, they likely did not feel the impact.

Mr. Thacker said that however, he had felt the impact greatly over the past few years due to the tax hike. He said that it was not just the tax hike, but also the fact that it was affecting all of them, including little old ladies who were struggling to make ends meet. He said that they were crying because it was hurting them so badly, and it was hurting all of them.

Mr. Thacker said that they could not afford basic necessities like groceries, cars, and mortgages. He said that he understood that the School Board was facing a difficult situation, but he believed they needed to put their efforts on pause for a year. He said that they should give them a chance to work together and find a better solution, rather than just throwing more money at the problem.

Mr. Thacker said that as a business owner, he knew that simply increasing funding did not solve the issue. He said that they needed to focus on what they were doing right and work together to find a solution. He said that this was not about pointing out everyone's mistakes, but about finding common ground and moving forward.

Mr. Thacker said that he was particularly concerned about the impact on property owners, like himself, who were seeing their taxes skyrocket. He said that his home taxes had increased from $900 two years ago to $1,300 on one of his properties. He said that it was intolerable. He said that he would close by again apologizing and thanking Jennifer in their purchasing department, who was a really nice person. He said that he appreciated the Board taking the time to hear from everyone in the forum.

Cathy McFall, Hartwood District, said that she was here to express her concern regarding an article she had read in the Freelance Star the previous weekend. She said that the article discussed military disability and how their County, which she loved dearly, was affected by this issue. She said that she had been drawn to Stafford County because of its strong military presence, particularly being in the backyard of Quantico.

Ms. McFall said that as a result of their County's vote to exempt disabled veterans from real estate taxes, she believed they were making a positive impact. She said that however, she never considered the internal and mental disabilities that some veterans may face. She said that recognizing this was crucial for their community. She said that unfortunately, this exemption was becoming a significant problem for them in Stafford. She said that according to the article, they were missing out on $22 million in revenue this year alone.

Ms. McFall said that therefore, she asked what steps the County would take to address this issue. She asked if the Board had contacted their state representatives or the federal government to bring attention to this problem. She said that these men and women had fought for their country, and it was only fair that they support them. She said that if they deserved exemptions, the County should not be penalized. She said that she would ask them to consider taking action at the state and federal levels. She said that the article mentioned that this issue would cost them an additional $11 million in the next year. She said that this was unsustainable.

Ms. McFall said that regarding the schools budget, she had heard that teachers were not being paid enough since she moved to the area in 2002. She said that she would like to know where the money was going. She said that they often discussed the school budget, but what about the County budget? She asked how much revenue were they generating? She said that that business growth was essential, as it was the only way to generate more revenue and avoid having to bear the costs themselves.

Terri Flowers, Widewater District, said that as a teacher for Stafford County Public Schools, she often felt that public schools were similar to young adults in their 20s - they always required money and it was difficult to track where the money was being spent. She said that she would like to request two things. She said that firstly, she believed more transparency was needed, particularly in regards to financial information, without the need for extensive Freedom of Information Act requests.

Ms. Flowers said that she was not sure if the Board could mandate this, but it would greatly simplify their process. She said that she thought that both sides had brilliant minds, but they could not effectively utilize them without more detailed information on how funds were being allocated. She said that additionally, she would like to request a pause on raising the tax rate, considering that property values had increased significantly over the past year.

Ms. Flowers said that even if the tax rate remained the same, their costs would rise due to these increased assessments. She said that she would like to see a pause and reassess their budget and spending strategies this year, potentially by combining resources between the Board of Supervisors and the school district. She said that this could allow them to make the most of their available funds and reassess their priorities for next year, based on more informed data.

PRESENTATIONS/REPORTS BY DEPARTMENTS

ITEM 7. BUDGET AND MANAGEMENT; CONSIDER AUTHORIZING ADVERTISEMENT FOR PUBLIC HEARINGS TO CONSIDER THE CY2025 TAX RATES, FY2026-20135 CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM, AND THE VIRGINIA PUBLIC SCHOOL AUTHORITY (VPSA) BOND ISSUANCE; PROPOSED RESOLUTION R25-29

Andrea Light, Chief Financial Officer, Stafford County, said that tonight staff was requesting the Board to advertise the public hearings for the Capital Improvement Program (CIP), Virginia Public School Authority (VPSA), and the Calendar Year 2025 (CY25) tax rates. She said that it should be noted that the tax rates cannot be adopted higher than they are advertised without a re-advertisement, but the tax rates can be adopted lower than they are advertised.

Ms. Light said that starting with the Capital Improvement Program, which includes a $1.4 billion 10-year plan for County projects, primarily for school construction and other facilities such as the courthouse, transportation, Fire and Rescue, parks, and other projects. She said that on the right-hand side, the Utilities had an enterprise fund that funded its own projects, primarily water, sewer, and other general projects. She said that the Board was being asked to advertise for a public hearing on VPSA bonds, which provided the community an opportunity to address the Board about potential Fiscal Year 2026 funding.

Ms. Light said that this public hearing did not bind the Board to issuing debt or issuing the full amount of debt as listed in the public hearing. She said that it would be brought back to the Board in the fall and spring as the issuances occurred. She said that it would include an $11.7M increase in FY27 and a $2.7M additional increase in FY28 as they paid interest on the borrowings.

Ms. Light said that displayed on the screen were the proposed Calendar Year 2025 tax rates, which include a $0.05 increase, going from $0.8936 to $0.9436. She said that a list of other tax rates was also provided. She said that there were no proposed changes to any other tax rates. She said that staff had prepared an ordinance and a replacement resolution, which the Clerk had provided to the Board, if they wished to increase the meals tax. She said that their meals tax was not included in the County Administrator's proposed budget.

Ms. Light said that a 1% increase would generate approximately $3.2 million in revenue, equivalent to about $0.012 on the real estate tax rate. She said that this increase would cap their meals tax, as counties are limited to a 6% meals tax rate. She said that staff had prepared this ordinance for their review and had compiled a list of comparative localities, including Stafford, which was currently at 5%, while some other localities were at 4% to 6%.

Ms. Gary said that when they had previously discussed raising the meals tax, she had opposed it and felt the same way now. She said that she would not be supporting a meals tax increase, but she was open to revisiting the topic later.

Dr. Yeung said that she knew that Prince William and Spotsylvania had a significant number of malls and a substantial income, and she had previously requested information on the revenue basis of how the actual numbers played out, as well as the reasons behind their current income levels, so that she could analyze the regional data more effectively. She said that in terms of raising the rate now, the fact that it was currently at 5% and the amount of information available led her to conclude that if they maintained this rate and advertised it at this level, it either needed to remain the same or decrease.

Ms. Light said that if the Board wished to maintain the current 5% rate, no further action was required because it was already at that level. She said that if the Board decided to modify the ordinance, they would need to hold a public hearing, advertise the proposed rate change, and then return to the public hearing to adopt the new rate.

Dr. Yeung asked if the following years' items were not included in the VPSA bonds, including the new wing at the high school.

Ms. Light said that the North Stafford High School Fine Arts Wing remained included. She said that what the CIP considered, and what the VPSA took into account, was the County Administrator's proposed budget, which had not been altered by any changes individual Board members may have discussed during their budget meetings. She said that if the Board were to modify the CIP and the associated issuances in Fiscal Year 26, this number could potentially change significantly.

Dr. Yeung said that she believed that simply adding a wing to the oldest school in the district was not the most effective solution. She said that in her opinion, North Stafford High School was due for replacement, as every other school in the district was built before it. She said that adding a wing to the existing structure and presenting it as a solution did not address the underlying issue. She said that she had advocated for Drew Middle School on multiple occasions over the years, and she was glad to see it finally moving forward.

Ms. Allen asked if the North Stafford wing was not included; it was in the FY27 amount for next year.

Ms. Light said that the North Stafford Fine Arts Wing project still had costs in Fiscal Year 26, specifically a $500,000 cost for planning and design, which was fully funded by VPSA. She said that the total project cost was $8.1 million, with funding spanning Fiscal Years 26 through 2029.

Ms. Gary said that she had some concerns regarding the proposed tax rate. She said that if they were to adopt the proposed rate, she was uncertain about the impact it would have on their community partners. She said that she understood that there were community organizations they partnered with, but she was not aware of the full scope of the potential effects of current federal changes on them.

Ms. Gary said that she was informed today that one of these organizations, a local food bank, was likely to lose a $250,000 grant. She said that some individuals on the board may be aware of this, as they served on the organization's board. She said that she believed there were many more community organizations that they did not fully understand the impact of on this proposal. She said that she could not make a hard commitment to their tax rate at this juncture because of the uncertainty regarding impacts of federal funding reductions.

Ms. Gary said that she thought it would be beneficial for staff to reach out to some of their community partners to gain a better understanding of the potential effects. She said that she did not want to prolong this discussion unnecessarily, but she was deeply concerned about the potential consequences, particularly for organizations that served vulnerable members of their community, such as a local food bank that fed people who could not afford food.

Mr. Diggs said that he requested reconsideration of the meal tax due to a $14 million dollar shortfall that they must address, and he wanted to ensure they had every tool available. He said that he was reviewing the budget items and had found that they could not fund the schools, cut the jail, reduce general government pay, or cut health benefits across the County, and still not make up the shortfall. He said that when they said no tax increase, he wanted to understand how they would achieve that funding.

Mr. Diggs said that he was supportive of there being no tax increase, but he had repeatedly stated his concerns and he wanted to know how they planned to address the issues this year. He said that that was why he was looking at all the issues and it was incumbent upon the Board to set politics aside and speak the truth. He said that everyone had to pay the increased taxes, just like the other residents did.

Mr. Diggs said that he did not want to pay any more taxes, but that was where he stood. He said that it was frustrating because until someone could tell him how they would fix these issues, they must have a serious conversation about it. He said that they were competing with their counterparts to the north and south to keep employees, which added to his concerns. He said that that was why he had asked to reconsider raising the meals tax, as he was trying to figure out how they could move forward and fill the gap.

Ms. Allen said that she would like to offer some answers to some of the public comments and questions posed to the Board. She said that one of the questions was asking why they needed 36 teachers for English as a Second Language (ESL)students. She said that the Standards of Quality (SOQ) laws for public schools requires a certain number of ESL teachers based on the number of ESL students, so the schools could not control that number. She said that she would also like to address the suggestion that they need to audit their financial records.

Ms. Allen said that there were also questions about auditing the finances for the schools and County government. She said that both the schools and the County were audited by PBM Mares, and both had received unqualified opinions, which was the highest rating for a public institution; it essentially meant their financial records matched what they were saying. She said that the public could request those records from the schools and the County if they would like.

Ms. Allen said that the Chair just asked where they would find funding. She said that public safety was a top priority for all of them, and they currently needed $4 million for their CAD system. She said that if they did not give them that funding for their radio systems, they would be putting public safety at risk for the Sheriff's Office and Fire and Rescue. She said that this alone cost almost $0.015. She said that the jail system alone had a $2.4 million increase that they had to fund, equivalent to almost a penny.

Ms. Allen said that even if they worked with the jail system to reduce costs, it was still a significant amount. She said that Ms. Vanuch had done a great job in reducing the jail budget over the past few years, but it was never going to reach zero. She said that school maintenance was also a notorious issue, as they had heard about major facility breakdowns in the schools over the past few years. She said that this year, a fire started at Shirley Heim, near her own child's locker.

Ms. Allen said that they also had issues with the hot water system at Rodney Thompson, and anyone who stepped into Drew Middle School was aware of the poor condition. She said that Hartwood Elementary was another facing serious issues. She said that those were on the bottom of the list; Brooke Point's radio system was in need of replacement for safety reasons because some students may not be able to hear emergency announcements over the loudspeaker.

Ms. Allen said that maintenance costs for schools alone totaled $1.3 million. She said that required debt service for the three new schools amounted to $4.8 million. She said that healthcare increases were also a significant concern, with the County facing a $1.8 million bill and the schools facing a $1.3 million bill, which they would still incur if they froze staff salaries. She said that these healthcare increases alone were $3.1 million.

Ms. Allen said that this came to a total of $13.5 million. She said that the Board was tasked with finding how to cut $13.5 million from the budget. She said that no one was suggesting that they raise taxes to cover the $13.5 million. She said that however, the reality they faced when the public told the Board make significant cuts or forgo certain services, they had a responsibility to fund essential services, such as health insurance. She said that at a minimum, they must raise taxes by $0.01 to cover this expense. She said that if they also funded the requests of public safety and fixed the radio system, that would bring it up to a $0.03 tax increase.

Ms. Allen said that they could not neglect their schools, as they must remain functional, so that was another $1.3 million in maintenance. She said that these were the tough decisions they faced when they heard the requests for a flat tax. She said that it was not something they could control, and it was not always within their power to make changes. She said that they had obligations to fulfill.

Ms. Gary said that she had heard that some of their colleagues had committed to keeping a flat tax rate, and she would like to know what the plan was for achieving that goal.

Ms. Vanuch asked if Ms. Gary had attended her budget meetings with staff.

Ms. Gary said that she was asking what the plan was in order to fund the necessary obligations while maintaining the same tax rate.

Ms. Vanuch said that if everyone attended their staff budget work sessions was to take advantage of the opportunity to review their plan. She said that she attended hers, and she was aware that Mr. English attended his. She said that during her review, she found several inefficiencies in both the school and County budgets.

Ms. Vanuch said that she spent the entire weekend examining both budgets and discovered enough savings to potentially reduce the tax rate by $0.02. She said that she was confident that the majority of the Board would not support that reduction, so she was comfortable and confident that they could move forward with the budget without raising taxes.

Ms. Vanuch said that this was a significant departure from previous years, when they had seen a substantial increase in tax rates. She said that in 2019, the School Board had requested a 5%

increase for everyone. She said that she recalled this from 2019, and it was met with strong opposition from teachers and educators who urged the Board to advertise at a rate of $1.01.

Ms. Vanuch said that this year, she had seen a significant number of constituents coming forward to request that they keep taxes flat. She said that they had raised taxes by 31.5% over the years, and she could provide a list of specific areas where costs had increased. She said that one example was the difference in leave payouts between the two bodies, which could be addressed by simply changing a policy. She said that by doing so, they could save a million dollars.

Ms. Vanuch said that there were indeed efficiencies in the budget that they could take advantage of. She proposed that they advertise a flat tax rate, which would require them to work together to find solutions for the constituents. She said that this approach would help to break the pattern of voting on high tax rates and then avoiding responsibility for providing adequate funding for the schools. She said that they could certainly come up with a plan. She said that the budget had increased by 31.5% due to these tax increases, and there must be funds available.

Ms. Vanuch said that she strongly disagreed with the notion that they must continually add to the tax rate and take money from their constituents. She said that this approach was not accurate. She said that if they were to advertise at a flat rate, it would force them to prioritize and roll up their sleeves.

Ms. Vanuch said that they had a wonderful Sheriff's Office, a wonderful Fire and Rescue department, and they knew that the schools were crucial to their community. She said that this was a priority for every person on the Board. She said that they could prioritize education and public safety funding, review the budget, and eliminate non-priority items that would not be missed. She said that she believed they could do this, but they had not been forced to do so in the past.

Ms. Vanuch said that every year, they brought up the veterans tax relief, asking the state for assistance. She said that it was challenging, like asking parents for more money when they already provided an allowance. She said that she had a conversation today with someone who read an article in the Freelance Star about the tax rate and veterans tax relief.

Ms. Vanuch said that they were upset because they felt they were not engaging with the issue fully; they were pitting the veterans against the tax rate. She said that she agreed, and they discussed the possibility of a panel discussion, inviting the Governor, and exploring solutions to drive revenue through new businesses. She said that if they were to put politics aside and focus on driving new businesses, they would not need a tax increase.

Ms. Vanuch said that she had this conversation every year, and she did have a plan. She said she would be voting tonight in order to commit to upholding her promise. She said that she had campaigned on not raising taxes and had a mandate from her voters. She said she would not vote to raise taxes this year, under any circumstances. She said that she would do everything in her power to work with the Board to ensure that they adequately funded the schools, paid for public safety, and maintained their current level of service. She said that they would not have to resort to required layoffs from staff, reduce public safety step increases, nor delay raises for County government. She said that however, they must be able to prioritize.

Ms. Gary said that she still did not hear an actual plan from Ms. Vanuch. She said that there did not appear to be a plan in motion here, and the measures she mentioned maintaining did not align with the priorities of everyone on this Board. She said that therefore, she was struggling to understand how they could have this conversation and reach an agreement when they did not mention maintaining funding for schools.

Ms. Gary said that there were concerns, and she would like to understand, where was the money coming from? She said that if she had gone through the plan and were willing to share it with the Board, she would be willing to listen. She said that she was willing to listen, and she thought they all would want to hear what it was.

Ms. Vanuch said that if they had followed the normal process, which would have had a work session tonight, but instead, they were having a public hearing. She said that the $13.5 million gap was not a reduction, but rather an increase to their budget. She said that every penny of that increase was a new expense, not a decrease from their current budget.

Ms. Vanuch said that it was not a matter of subtracting; they were currently above their current budget, and this proposed increase would further increase that amount. She said that she did not have to share the plan right now. She said that they had a plan every single year when they go through the budget; it was the other four Supervisors who did not want to work with this plan.

Dr. Yeung said that she wanted to ensure that the comments made were fair and accurate. She said that when Ms. Vanuch mentioned four Supervisors, she wanted to clarify that they all worked together, including when she was Chair, Ms. Bohmke was Chair, and Ms. Vanuch was Chair. She said that they had collaborated on raising taxes for the past three years.

Dr. Yeung said that they all raised taxes and Ms. Vanuch was a part of that. She said that she did not want to hear that four people wanted to raise taxes. She said that they had done it together, and she believed that should be acknowledged. She also said that she wanted to address the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, which she had warned them all about two years ago. She said that she warned it was unwise to use them that way, and now they were facing the consequences. She said that they now had to pay for the Sheriff's Department because of that budgeting decision.

Dr. Yeung said that it was not the Sheriff's Department's fault; she loved working with them. She said that all she was saying was that Ms. Vanuch only referenced her and Mr. English meeting with staff, but she did so also. She said she had done her job, and she was still working through the information. She said that this was staff's budget; the County Administrator and Ms. Light had been enlightening them for days to tell them what possible, along with Mr. Fulmer from the school division. She said that she was fully aware of the schools' processes as a former School Board member, so she would be glad to assist in answering the Board of Supervisors' questions.

Dr. Yeung said that she was still working through the budget numbers and potential adjustments, so she was not necessarily ready to make a final decision today. She said that she would vote based on staff's recommendations today. She asked what it would take to only run the government and school system without going through each line item. She said that again, she had already had her meeting with County staff.

Ms. Light said that the budget included a $16.45 million increase, with $14.3 million attributed to property tax. She said that of that property tax increase, the real estate rate was expected to rise by $7.5 million, largely due to a $0.05 increase per $100 of assessed value, with each penny equivalent to approximately $2.7 million. She said that the proposed budget had $11.8 million in increased tax relief to offset unfunded state mandates.

Ms. Bohmke said that she had been listening to the discussion and the public comments from this evening. She said that they had R25-29 in front of them, which combined the different tax rates for real estate, the CIP, and the VPSA borrow. She said that she hoped they could break these out separately.

Ms. Bohmke motioned, seconded by Mr. English, to advertise the real estate tax rate at $0.8936.

Ms. Allen said that she wanted to clarify the record on two points. She said that she did not sit on this Board and she did not make political innuendos or attacks on individuals. She said that, however, every single Board member had voted in favor of a tax rate increase over the last four years. She said that this was a verifiable fact, and she encouraged anyone to look it up. She said that no one should say that they were wholly against tax increases. She said that hypothetically, if they were to adopt a flat tax rate, as Ms. Bohmke was advocating for in her motion, she would like to know the effects it would have on the out-years of their debt obligation.

Ms. Allen said that, as someone who had been on this Board for five years, she had been arguing that keeping tax rates flat for an extended period could lead to a higher tax rate in the outer years as obligations and expenses increased. She said that she would appreciate it if staff could provide the math to demonstrate what would happen to their debt obligation in the next five years if they did not increase taxes.

Ms. Light said that she had the five-year plan that they had previously proposed and submitted to the Board in the fall. She said that the tax rate increase in the five-year plan, which began in Fiscal Year 26, included a meals tax rate increase, resulting in a $0.02 lower rate compared to this proposal. She said that in Fiscal Year 27, the tax rate increase would be $0.96 and it would continue to increase to $0.98 through the end of the five-year period, finally reaching approximately $0.99

Ms. Light said that there were significant pressures on bonds that would be borrowed for schools, transportation, and County projects, such as the $209 million courthouse project, which was expected to be completed within the next five years. She said that as a result, they would start to see the debt service for these projects begin to take effect.

Ms. Allen said that hypothetically, the courthouse project could potentially be pushed to the out-years, She said that there were other rates that they could not push out. She said that the rates Ms. Light had provided were based on a scenario where they would set the rate, potentially advertise it, and set it at the rate Mr. Ashton had presented to them two weeks ago. She asked what the next potential rate would look like if they kept it at the current rate.

Ms. Light said that to accurately assess the impact, they needed to consider the operating costs that were being removed. She said that if an operating cost was eliminated permanently, such as Operating Cost X, it was no longer a consideration. She said that if it was an operating cost that was expected to recur, for instance, if the Board decided to adopt a budget that they did not want to implement the public safety step plan in Fiscal Year 26, the average increase was 2.75%.

Ms. Light said that the following year, the potential increase could be doubled, and possibly even higher due to inflation. She said that it would depend on the specific cost, and if it was deemed essential to move forward, they could add inflation to it, resulting in an additional expense.

Ms. Allen said that logic would suggest that schools would follow a similar process if they were to remove items like those from their budget. She said that the only significant items they could cut from this budget or from the rate would be those that were one-time expenses, where they no longer had a use for them. She said that this would allow them to eliminate them from operational costs and, if it was a human job, remove it from increases such as healthcare and salary costs.

Ms. Allen said that she had not yet reached that page, although she was good about reading her budget book and asking questions, and she was generally good at estimating where they were at. She asked if Ms. Light thought there was anything in the budget she and her staff had prepared that could be removed. She said that Ms. Gary had made a valid point about the need for a plan to address this. She said that when they gave feedback to staff, one of the things they often asked was whether they were engaging with staff to identify potential areas for cost reduction. She asked if, in putting this budget together, did Ms. Light see any one-time expenses or one-time occurrences that they could eliminate, which would prevent them from coming back onto the books next year and potentially doubling or tripling in inflationary costs or basic costs.

Ms. Light said that she believed that they had a significant opportunity this year to thoroughly review the budget in a new way with the new County Administrator. She said that the County Administrator's budget had already reduced their operating budget by $4 million. She said that in order to cut it further, they should examine services. She said that for example, they had increased vacancy savings, which allowed them to project potential savings when positions were not filled.

Ms. Light said that they were currently on track to achieve approximately $5 million in vacancy savings. She said that this would be a managed vacancy savings program, where departments would be required to hold positions open for a specified period, eliminating overlap and ensuring that new positions did not come in with short notice. She said that this would operate at a reduced staff capacity while maintaining the same level of services as before.

Ms. Allen said that her next question was for Mr. Ashton. She said that since he had been appointed to the Board over the past six months, she would like to recall one of the mandates they had given Mr. Ashton regarding staffing as it relates to services. She said that the Board had asked him to contract out certain departments, such as Planning and Zoning, to consultants. She said that they had done this because they were understaffed and overworked.

Ms. Allen said that currently, they did not have staff to manage what they had, and further reducing their services or manpower would significantly impact their ability to attract businesses and expedite their opening process. She said that they had already lost staff to competing Counties, including from that same Planning and Zoning Department. She said that she was so thankful that Transportation and Utilities had enough manpower, but Community Development, which was meant to attract and assist businesses to the area, had to have their services consulted out because they did not have the manpower to do the work.

Ms. Allen said that further depleting their resources did not make sense, as it would hinder their ability to generate revenue, especially with several data center projects coming online that were supposed to alleviate the tax burden. She said that she understood that staff was not entirely aware of the totality of these issues, and she would not bring up their severe understaffing issues at every meeting. She said that their Deputy Planning and Zoning Director was set to retire, and they needed to find a replacement. She said that they had finally hired a Zoning Administrator after months of searching for the right candidate. She said that every time they found someone, they left their County for better pay somewhere else.

Ms. Gary said that she understood things had gotten heated and she appreciated the public's and her colleagues' grace and patience. She said that she was genuinely trying to comprehend the concerns and perspectives that had been shared. She said that she recognized that the budget was not just a financial document, but a moral one that affected the well-being and future of their children. She said that it was essential to consider the investment they made in their children, regardless of their background, and to recognize that every child deserved access to education and medical care. She said that she was committed to seeking a deeper understanding of these complex issues, and she had been studying the Republican Creed, which emphasized clarity and independence.

Ms. Gary said that she was compelled to speak out if she continued to hear concerns about the current situation. She said that as a faithful woman and someone who loved the Lord, she believed that Christ cared for children and that their creed affirmed the principle of equal rights for all individuals. She said that she was not sure if their creed needed to be revised or if certain individuals needed to be held accountable for not upholding this principle.

Ms. Gary said that however, she was committed to standing up for every single person, regardless of who they were, because that was where their strength lay. She said that they would care for each other, and she would do everything in her power to ensure that happened. She said that she wanted to understand the plan to implement these deep cuts, and she hoped her colleagues who had made this commitment would share their insights with her.

Ms. Gary said that she would like to know the priorities and how they could achieve them. She said that she had seen miracles happen in the past when they worked together to find solutions and make changes. She said that she was not sure if the cuts they were considering could be as deep as required to keep the same tax rate, but she wanted to know more.

Ms. Gary said that she did not want to sit in silence and refuse to work together; instead, she believed they must collaborate to find a way forward. She said that she appreciated everyone's patience, and she was confident that they all cared deeply about what they were doing there. She said that she hoped that some of her colleagues would take the time to speak with her after the meeting and enlighten her about these plans, as she genuinely wanted to understand the situation.

Ms. Vanuch said that she wanted to address two quick clerical matters regarding the information she had heard. She said that the PB Mares accounting audit was a standard accounting process, rather than a forensic audit of where the funds were being spent. She said that she believed the residents who brought up audit concerns did have a valid point in ensuring accountability.

Ms. Vanuch said that she had been surprised in the past by the costs of certain projects without the Board's knowledge. She said she also wanted to clarify that no one had stated that they would never vote for a tax increase. She said that not all seven of them had said they had never voted for a tax increase, nor would they ever. She said she recalled when Dr. Yeung was Chair, and they had advertised a 40% tax increase. She said she was opposed to that, but she had voted to raise taxes that year because they needed to pay for public safety pay raises using ARPA funds.

Ms. Vanuch said they had used those funds to give the pay raises, as it was one of the few areas where they could utilize the funds according to federal guidelines. She said that by doing so, they were able to divert the tax increase into a later year. She said she had voted on that and would defend it to anyone who questioned it. She said that they did have to work together, but they had to advertise a rate that forced it. She said that she would be supporting Ms. Bohmke's motion.

Mr. Diggs said that they were very passionate about this issue, and it could get heated. He said that that was what was supposed to happen. He said that it was not supposed to be an easy decision for them, but ultimately, they would make what was right for Stafford. He said that their decisions did impact people, so they would take that into consideration. He must admit, it broke his heart to see citizens become emotional during this discussion. He said that at the end of the day, their emotions impacted people, and they would take all of that into consideration. they would strive to make informed decisions. He asked Ms. Bohmke to restate her motion.

Ms. Bohmke said that her motion was to maintain the real estate tax rate at the existing rate of $0.8936. She said that she wanted to take this opportunity to express her gratitude to everyone who attended, particularly their constituents who came out to share their thoughts. She said that she listened to every single person, and she apologized for not being able to be there in person, as this was the first time in 16 years she had missed a meeting as an elected official due to a family situation.

Ms. Bohmke said that she wanted to assure them that their opinions mattered, and she appreciated the eloquent comments made by everyone. She said that it was clear that they all brought different perspectives to the table. She said that as a conservative, she believed it was her responsibility to identify areas where they could make cuts, just as she would with her personal budget.

Ms. Bohmke said that it was not an easy task, but she was committed to finding ways to make it work. She said that given the significant increases they had seen over the last three years, she firmly believed it was their duty to make adjustments this year to support their constituents.

Mr. English said that he was supportive of the $0.89 because they were currently in an uncertain period, with the possibility of job losses over the next six to eight months. He said that he empathized with the challenges their residents faced in addressing the tax rate, as he had personal experience with it. He said that his mother, who was 80 years old, also paid taxes, and he understood the difficulties they were all facing.

Mr. English said that he believed they would have to make tough decisions in the coming budget meetings, but he thought it was essential that they came together as a team to identify necessary cuts. He said that as Ms. Vanuch had suggested, they needed to roll up their sleeves and work collaboratively to find solutions, which is why he was supporting an advertised rate of $0.89.

Mr. Diggs said that he would not be supporting the motion. He said that however, he would be willing to work together towards achieving that rate. He said that as he had stated before, he was committed to putting the needs of their employees, who were also their constituents. He said that as they moved forward, he was willing to work together to find a compromise that met everyone's needs. He said that he was open to making cuts, but that was where he stood.

Ms. Allen made a substitute motion, seconded by Ms. Gary, to advertise a public hearing for the FY26 real estate tax rate of $0.9436.

Dr. Yeung said that their budget considerations were challenging, and she believed that they did not necessarily need to level-set the rate in order to find savings. She said that it should be clarified that they were advertising the rate, but not setting it tonight. She said that she wanted to emphasize that this decision was not made lightly, as it required balancing the needs of various stakeholders, including the school system, first responders, County staff, Parks and Recreation, elderly residents, and veterans.

Dr. Yeung said that the uncertainty surrounding the federal government funding meant that they must also consider the potential impact on their community as a whole. She said that she planned to work closely with the County Administration and staff to find a solution that worked for everyone. She said that as the experts, she would rely on staff’s guidance.

Dr. Yeung said that she was confident that with persistence and a willingness to listen to both sides, they could find a feasible solution. She said that she had already begun exploring potential cuts and had been discussing them from both sides in order to determine what they could reduce. She said that as Ms. Vanuch said, it did not take hard work but it did take persistence, and she believed they could achieve it together.

Mr. Diggs called the vote on the substitute motion to advertise a public hearing for the FY26 real estate tax rate of $0.9436.

The Voting Board tally was:

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

No: (3) Bohmke, English, Vanuch

Ms. Allen motioned, seconded by Ms. Gary, to approve Proposed Resolution R25-29, excluding real estate.

Ms. Bohmke said that for the record, regarding the Capital Improvement Program for all road projects, Butler Road was a $1 million project scheduled for 10 years from now. She said that Enon Road and the Connector were also slated for future years, as are Centreport Parkway, Route 1, and I-95, and Route 36. She said that she would like to see these projects moved up to earlier years. She said that there were transportation studies scheduled for the next three years, but the specific projects were not indicated on the CIP. She said that she would like to request that the Belmont Ferry Farm Trail be moved up to an earlier date, rather than 2034.

The Voting Board tally was:

Yea: (7) Allen, Bohmke, Diggs, English, Gary, Vanuch, Yeung
No: (0)

ITEM 8. PLANNING AND ZONING, CONSIDER AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND STAFFORD COUNTY CODE SEC. 28-15, "TABLE OF USES AND STANDARDS" TO MODIFY HOW DATA CENTERS ARE PERMITTED; PROPOSED ORDINANCE O25-08

Steven Apicella, Chair of the Planning Commission, called the Planning Commission meeting to order.

Kelsey Caudill, Secretary of the Planning Commission, said that a quorum was present and included Commissioners Kristen Barnes, Kecia Evans, Laura Sellers, Willie Shelton, Jr., and herself. She said that Commissioner Carlos Bratton was absent.

Mr. Diggs read the rules for a joint Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission public hearing.

Mr. Diggs opened the public hearing.

Mike Zuraf, Director of Planning and Zoning, said that tonight, they were considering an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance. He said that this proposal would remove data centers from their current position as a by-right use in the M-2 district and require a conditional use permit (CUP) in the M-2 zoning district.

Mr. Zuraf said that the map before them highlighted the properties in the County currently zoned M-2, with undeveloped properties in red and developed properties in light blue. He said that these properties were subject to the ordinance being considered tonight. He said that for background, in October 2023, the Planning Commission and Board had addressed data centers in the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance, approving amendments that defined what a data center was and where they would be permitted in the Zoning Ordinance.

Mr. Zuraf said that as a result, data centers had been specifically designated as a by-right use in the M-2 district, accompanied by special regulations. He said that in an amendment to the Comprehensive Plan, they had established guidelines for data center development, including siting and design. He said that data centers were recognized as a vital component of the County's economic development strategy, offering diversification of the economy and tax base.

Mr. Zuraf said that they also generated significant tax revenue and high-paying jobs. He said that however, infrastructure needs must be considered, including the proximity to high-voltage electricity and facility cooling requirements. He said that other factors to consider included traffic impacts, building and site design, environmental constraints, potential visual and noise concerns, and opportunities for additional amenities and capital improvements.

Mr. Zuraf said that to provide background on this amendment, he would like to recall that in January, the Board had recommended that this amendment be referred to the Planning Commission and initiated the effort for a joint public hearing. He said that it was worth noting that data centers would still be permitted in the Integrated Corporate and Technology Park (ICTP) overlay zone, which was a unique designation that had never been applied to any parcels in their records. He said that this amendment did not affect that designation.

Mr. Zuraf said that when discussing conditional use permits and the process, the Zoning ordinance outlined the types of uses that were generally compatible with other permitted uses in each zoning district. He said that however, these uses may require additional review due to their unique characteristics or potential impacts on the surrounding area. He said that the Zoning Ordinance also outlined the conditions that could be imposed by the County, including measures to abate noise and smoke, establish setbacks to prevent traffic congestion, control ingress and egress, and enhance buffers.

Mr. Zuraf said that these conditions could be customized based on the specific use being requested. He said that in rezonings, the County could receive voluntary proffers, which could be more extensive than the conditions of a CUP in terms of limitations and mitigations. He said that proffers could address the full future development potential of a project site, involve multiple potential uses, and expand beyond the project area.

Mr. Zuraf said that they could include restrictions on uses, physical improvements, monetary contributions, and phasing of development over time. The County Planning staff was currently considering numerous data center applications, which were in various stages of construction and review. He said that the provided map illustrated the locations of 12 of the projects currently before them and being considered.

Mr. Zuraf said that additionally, a 13th project had been submitted last week, indicating more were on the way. He said that to further break down these cases, four of the 13 projects already had zoning entitlements in place and were in various stages of construction. He said that the remaining applications in review were pending zoning reclassification applications being considered.

Mr. Zuraf said that staff recommended approval of Proposed Ordinance O25-08, which would move data center uses from the by-right use to the conditional use permit category in the M-2 district. He said that for new data center projects proposed on parcels within the M-2 district, a CUP would now be required as a concurrent application with the rezoning request. He said that for projects on parcels not zoned M-2, the rezoning application and use permit would be required.

Mr. Zuraf said that the approval ordinance included an exemption, known as grandfathering, for applications submitted prior to February 18, 2025. He said that this exemption applied to all pending zoning applications, except for the new application received last week. He said that furthermore, the new application already included a concurrent condition-use permit application for an electric substation, allowing them to easily modify their existing application.

Ms. Bohmke said that she was in full support of transferring the data center use from by-right to CUP, and also favored applying this to all outstanding applications.

Kristen Barnes said that they had seen reclassifications come in with a CUP required, only to have the CUP waived if the reclassification proffers were deemed equivalent to the CUP. She asked if that could happen with these data centers as well.

Mr. Zuraf said that they had received some applications with that situation, but they did not follow that practice anymore.

Dr. Yeung said that she recalled that they had begun discussing the water issue and had now moved on to the M-2 zoning. She said that she would like to clarify whether they were also planning to establish an ordinance for water, as that was the initial concern. She said that he mentioned that exemptions would be based on a list, because some were under review.

Mr. Zuraf said that the pending applications that had not yet received zoning approval must undergo the full process. He said that as a result, they were not yet fully approved. He said that they had been submitted, were currently under staff review, and must go through the public hearing process. He said that the exception to this was the first four projects, which had been initially exempt in 2023.

Dr. Yeung asked if they could create an ordinance to address the water usage for data centers.

Mr. Zuraf said that the water issue was certainly a major consideration. He said that tonight, the main issue before them was whether or not to require a conditional use permit. He said that the issue of creating a separate ordinance regarding water was not something he could address tonight, as he had not had the opportunity to discuss it with the Utilities staff and would be considered as a separate issue from this proposed ordinance.

Mr. English asked if a CUP would be required for a building to exceed height restrictions.

Mr. Zuraf said that that was correct.

Mr. English asked how this ordinance would affect that situation.

Mr. Zuraf said that there was a CUP requirement that applied if a building exceeded the maximum height of 65 feet in the M-2 zone. He said that specifically, any building above that height was required to obtain a conditional use permit. He said that the consideration for this permit should focus on the height, rather than the use of the building. He said that in this case, they were actually considering the full use of the data center, which included the data center use itself, rather than just the height of the building.

Mr. English asked if any other County had this type of CUP requirement for data centers in an M-2 zoning district.

Mr. Zuraf said that he was unsure; he would have to look back through their old research.

Mr. English asked if the 13 projects in the pipeline would not have to adhere to this ordinance.

Mr. Zuraf said that the ordinance was proposed and presented in this manner, and it was ultimately up to the Board to decide how to modify it if desired.

Mr. English asked if any of the 13 projects would be in the M-2 district.

Mr. Zuraf said that all 13 projects were on properties that required a rezoning.

Mr. English asked if they would have a CUP in those cases.

Mr. Zuraf said that with those 13 cases, they would have proffers involved.

Mr. Apicella said that Mr. Zuraf mentioned that there were 13 projects in the queue, totaling approximately 25 million square feet. He said that if the average data center building was 250,000 square feet, that equated to 100 data center buildings. He asked if any of their current M-2 sites not yet proposed for data centers near residential areas.

Mr. Zuraf said that there were some M-2 zoned land along Celebrate Virginia Parkway, and Heritage Commerce Park, which contained numerous smaller M-2 zoned properties that may not be suitable for data centers. He said that there were approximately two to three larger M-2 properties located along Celebrate Virginia Parkway, adjacent to apartments situated on the same parkway. He said that the larger M-2 sites, however, were situated outside of the urban service area and were near larger lot homes, which were not necessarily high-intensity or high-density residential areas.

Mr. Apicella said that if this were approved, a CUP would help mitigate the potential impacts on sites close to residential areas, as opposed to by-right, where they would have limited ability to set conditions and the developer could make changes as long as they met the performance standards.

Mr. Zuraf said that that was correct; for any issues would dictate the need for additional conditions, the County would have that ability with the proposed process.

Mr. Apicella said that the M-2 sites depicted on this visual were relatively scarce across the County. He said that therefore, this would likely have a limited impact, as viewed from the map currently. He said that among the data center projects, he would like to inquire about those that had been proposed or approved. He said that specifically, he would like to know if there had been any proposals for data centers in areas that were not typically expected, such as those not near water sources or suitable locations for reuse water, or those not near high-voltage transmission lines.

Mr. Zuraf said that Potomac Church and Stafford Tech Campus were bisected by powerlines, but the other two approved projects, Pemberton #3 and Melrod Vantage were not near any powerlines. He said that he was not certain about the water usage for either Pemberton or Melrod Vantage, but he did not believe either of them would require a larger amount of potable water.

Mr. Apicella said that he brought this up because they were speculating on the viability of data centers, and they had seen instances where they had appeared in unexpected locations. He said that currently, they had 13 data centers in the queue, and they had projected potential locations for M-2 sites. He said that it was possible that they could identify additional sites that were not initially anticipated, as data centers may find alternative ways to obtain electricity or cooling.

Mr. Zuraf said that it was a possibility.

Mr. Apicella said that related to Dr. Yeung's question, they had begun this process approximately two years ago, exploring data centers and developing rules and regulations, as well as performance standards. He said that over time, they had gained a better understanding of the issues involved. He asked if they would be considering revisiting the performance standards and making adjustments to address the challenges they had encountered.

Mr. Zuraf said that now that they had reviewed a few cases and observed the trends, it was beneficial to reevaluate their current policies and procedures. He said that it was also prudent to review what was in their records and consider whether any changes were necessary.

Ms. Allen said that she would be voting against this item. She said that she had previously stated that data centers were at the forefront of their technology and would not waste time using well water. She said that it was counterproductive to their approach, so she was unclear as to why they were concerned about using well water. She said that if one understood how their cooling systems worked, it became evident that well water would not be sufficient to sustain their buildings.

Ms. Allen said that consequently, they would need to come to the County to establish a water agreement. She said that their staff had done an excellent job with their water service agreements. She said that she was confident that even if it was a by-right use, they would come to the County and they would be able to negotiate favorable terms that they had had in the past.

Ms. Gary said that she did not support this proposal, and she would not support it now. She said that she believed that their County and Board needed to ensure that they were effectively communicating with the state on standards that would enable them to address these issues at a higher level, which would be beneficial in navigating future challenges.

Ms. Caudill said that she agreed with Mr. Apicella; she had questions but not about the by-right use versus the conditional use permitting.

Willie Shelton, Jr. asked Mr. Zuraf if the conditional use permits were more advantageous than proffers.

Mr. Zuraf said that the proffers would be more comprehensive and it was not necessarily that the use permit conditions replaced proffers. He said that if a rezoning was required, it may actually be a combination of proffers and condition use permits. He said that proffers, in general, could provide more extensive mitigation than a condition use permit would.

Mr. Shelton said that he believed they had established some stringent policies, but agreed with Mr. Apicella that it may be time to revisit and reevaluate them.

Ms. Barnes asked if he could provide the minimum parcel size required to build a data center. She said that considering the average data center is approximately one building of 250,000 square feet, the minimum parcel size would likely be substantial. She asked what the odds were that the smaller parcels could coalesce into one area suitable for a data center.

Mr. Zuraf said that he was not a data center developer, so he could only give an educated guess rather than speak from experience. He said that the Potomac Church data center site, which was likely the smallest they would see, was approximately 50 acres in size. He said that given the environmental area on the site, he believed that the minimum size for a data center of this nature would likely be around 40 acres.

Ms. Vanuch said that this discussion arose because, as Mr. Apicella had mentioned, the Board had directed the Planning Commission to develop requirements for building data centers to mitigate the impacts on residents. She said that they had established a great policy, and she agreed that now that they had gained experience and reviewed the process, it was time for the Planning Commission to reassess if any modifications were needed to the policy.

Ms. Vanuch said that she was fully in support of taking that as an additional step. She said that one of the outcomes of creating the data center ordinance had been that they had moved data centers from being by right to being by right in specific zoning categories, such as B-1, B-2, and M-1. She said that they wanted to place them only in more industrial areas of the County, but then found that the M-2 district was scattered around the County.

Ms. Vanuch said that they had a zoning change many years ago and they could not remove that designation. She said that the experience had taught them that they may need to revisit the policy and remove the by-right designation for M-2. If they were currently zoned as B-2, they would need to rezone to M-2, which would benefit them as they would have to provide proffers.

Ms. Vanuch said that if the land was designated as M-2, they could proceed with the project immediately without any oversight or public hearing. She said that the purpose of this process had been to introduce a mechanism that required a conditional use permit to offset and mitigate the impacts on residents, ensuring that public hearings took place. She said that she wanted to provide this context for anyone who was paying attention, as they had made significant progress on this issue and were now at this point.

Laura Sellers said that with a conditional use permit, the focus was on the use. She said that with data centers and these complexes, it was common to have multiple users, as she had observed on Centreport Parkway, based on the signs and flags being erected there. She said that to stay agile, they needed to find a way to allow data centers and these facilities to operate effectively, meeting their needs as they grew and expanded their businesses, while also addressing the needs they had outlined.

Mr. Zuraf said that the conditions permitted certain procedures. He said that when an application came to them at the staff level, they reviewed it to identify any potential issues and drafted proposed conditions for the project. He said that they then shared these conditions with the applicant to determine if there were any major red flags for the applicant. He said that they worked to address any issues that arose and may have needed to impose conditions that could be a challenge for the applicant, but they strived to set parameters that would control the use in a proper manner without overly restricting their ability to operate.

Ms. Sellers said that as a follow-up, she would like to know what types of conditions they would put on a conditional use permit, as many of these permits were tied to specific operational hours. She said that for example, a data center was typically open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and they would need to consider factors such as lighting, noise, and other environmental impacts. She said that she was concerned that a conditional use permit may not provide the level of control they needed, as it would essentially be a contract between the parties.

She said that her goal was not to give a false impression of what a conditional use permit could accomplish. She said that if their objective was to bring this to a public hearing, perhaps they could explore alternative approaches to involve the community and gather feedback. She said that she was struggling to visualize what the contract for a CUP would look like and how it would be enforceable, especially considering the data center's 24/7 operation model.

Mr. Zuraf said that with a condition permit for a data center, it would be distinct from a drive-through restaurant, primarily due to the differing traffic demands. He said that since a data center operates 24/7, this was a given consideration. He said that the Board and Commission had to decide whether this use was suitable for the proposed location.

Mr. Zuraf said that when crafting conditions, it was essential to make them site-specific, taking into account the unique characteristics of the proposed site. He said that conditions may include visual impacts, such as the need for additional landscaping or setbacks, height restrictions, and noise attenuation measures, depending on the site's features, such as the absence of tree cover.

Dr. Yeung said that they had initially discussed water and noise issues, which she had raised during previous meetings. She said that if they established an ordinance prohibiting the use of either potable water or groundwater, it would effectively stop the issue. She said that they required water, and an ordinance would address where they could source their water from. She said that similarly, addressing the noise issue with another ordinance would be a logical step.

Dr. Yeung said that based on staff's explanation, they could proffer for specific things, but she would like to know what would happen if another M-2 property, such as Vulcan, sold their land inside for data center usage.

Mr. Zuraf said that he was aware that the Vulcan sites currently had proffer restrictions, which meant they had to submit a proffer amendment to address those restrictions.

Dr. Yeung asked if the previously submitted and approved data centers would be subject to submitting CUPs.

Mr. Zuraf said that now, there were many M-2 properties in this area. He said that some of these properties already had development restrictions through existing proffers. He said that a small handful of the remaining M-2 properties could potentially come in by right. He said that the mechanism to obtain mitigation from these properties was through the CUP process.

Dr. Yeung said that the ones that they had grandfathered in were the ones they planned to continue with their work, as they had been thoroughly vetted. She said that they had gone through the necessary process, and they had already been reviewed, accepted, and cleared for their work. She said that she was comfortable with this arrangement as long as they were able to continue receiving the necessary funding.

Mr. Zuraf said that those four projects had already received approval, and their site plans had been cleared. He said that construction on those projects was now underway.

Mr. Diggs opened the public hearing. He asked if any members of the public wished to address this item.

Darla Stencavage, Garrisonville District, said that "lizard time" was the concept of laying outside and soaking up the sun because when worked in a Secure Compartment and Information Facility (SCIF), they did not get sunlight. She said that when they were buying their property, the biggest concern for them was being able to spend time outside and get some vitamin D.

Ms. Stencavage said that given that many of they on the Board have owned their properties for more than two years, her only concern was that the public was aware of what could be developed in these areas beforehand. She said that before they purchased their property, they conducted thorough research and due diligence to ensure that the land behind them would not be developed. She said that however, shortly after they moved in, that property was rezoned, which was very frustrating.

Ms. Stencavage said that she believed this experience frustrated many residents with the County government, as they expected a certain outcome but got something else. She said that, regardless of whether it was a CUP or rezoning, the public needed to be informed about potential developments in advance. She said that this allowed them to plan and rely on the information, which was essential for making informed decisions about their properties.

Alane Callander, Falmouth District, said that a few of them had attended the public hearing and she believed it would be beneficial for Supervisors and Commissioners to hear from the public before making a decision on this matter. She said that she would like to compliment Mr. Apicella and Ms. Vanuch; she agreed with their comments. She said that she thought there did need to be a CUP.

Ms. Callander said that this morning, she and her husband looked out their kitchen window and attempted to envision what 200 feet back would look like if a data center were to be constructed there. She said that it would be an eyesore and ruin their view. She said that this was a concern for many residents, particularly those living near manufacturing-zoned areas.

Ms. Callander said that while they were fortunate to have only a few scattered throughout the County, it was essential to acknowledge that there may be potential impacts for those living near these areas. She said that as they considered the placement of data centers, she would like to propose that they prioritize the preservation of trees, regardless of the zoning. She said that she would like to see trees along Route 1, near the industrial areas. She said that given that trees would be removed to build data centers, it would be beneficial to plant new trees along their corridors.

Linda Muller, Aquia District, said that prior to this meeting, she listened to the conversations and comments, and she agreed that Stafford needs revenue. She said that data centers could provide that, and they had many planned in the County. She said that she appreciated the discussion this evening on the CUP. She said that she always learned something new when she attended these meetings. She said that she particularly appreciated Mr. Apicella’s suggestion to reconsider or review the performance standards for data centers.

Ms. Muller said that having a conditional use permit on M-2 provided an additional layer of input and flexibility for the Board of Supervisors when it came to data center projects. She said that these projects were not uniform, and factors such as water usage and cooling methods varied significantly. She said that in her previous meetings on data centers, noise had consistently been a topic of discussion. She said that having a conditional use permit would be beneficial to the Board of Supervisors as it would allow them to have a say in the project.

Vicki Lindberg, Falmouth District, said that her house had been owned by her father-in-law for 50 years. She said that she and her husband were currently purchasing that home, as her father-in-law was in hospice care. She said that recently, they received a notification about a data center planned to be built behind this property within a residential area. She said that they must take necessary steps to protect their residents.

Ms. Lindberg said that as she mentioned earlier, the proposed project was 160 feet away from the closest house. She said that they must prioritize the well-being of their residents. She said that while data centers could help bridge budget gaps and achieve their goals, they could not compromise the quality of life for their residents. She said that the quality of life was crucial, and she urged them all to consider this as they voted on this ordinance.

Kristen Maxson, Falmouth District, said that as she listened to the discussion today, she heard the phrase "scattered" used to describe the data centers. She said that fortunately, they were indeed scattered; they did not want them all in one place. She said that she recalled a person who brought this concern to light in March 2023, although the issue was first raised in 2020 when the applications were submitted. She said that this meant that the concern about safety had been ongoing for approximately five years.

Ms. Maxson asked if they were prioritizing public safety or AAA ratings. She said that AAA ratings were temporary and could be revoked at any time. She said that she believed that people wanted to stay in Stafford, and that was where their heart was. She said that the Utilities packet for January 14, 2025, and the Ordinance of 25-01, suggested that some individuals viewed excessive water usage as a serious offense, potentially leading to felony charges. She asked if this was how they treated their community.

Ms. Maxson said that thankfully, someone said that they should make sure not to go down that road. She said that there were legitimate safety concerns that needed to be addressed. She said that on March 11 of this year, the Utilities meeting was canceled immediately at the start of the meeting, without waiting to see if anyone would show up.

Ms. Maxson said that this meeting was important for addressing the concerns that the Board and Commission were discussing tonight. She said that the presentation on Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA), was scheduled for this meeting, and it asked if the public had any questions about utilities and data handling. She said that the same individual who presented the data centers in the EDA also presented the information at this meeting.

Ms. Maxson said that furthermore, the fact that the Planning and Zoning Administrator position had been vacant for a year and a half, only to be filled by the same person who presented the data centers, was a concerning example of presenting the cake and eating it too. She said that it was too much responsibility for one person to handle. She said that this was what they were looking for: safe staff and safe members of the Stafford community.

Charlie Payne said that he was representating the data center industry, many of whom had applied and gone through their rigorous zoning process. He said that their primary concern was the impact of this conditional use permit on data center investment in Stafford County. He said that as they were aware, data centers had been a targeted growth industry in the County since 2018, generating approximately $18,500,000 in annual tax revenue for every million square feet. He said that he was surprised to hear someone mention that it was every one square foot, but data centers indeed punched above their weight. He said that for every $26 invested, the County incurred a cost of $1.

Mr. Payne said that there was no other industrial use in the County or the Commonwealth that generated such significant tax revenue and benefits. He said that he was concerned that this conditional use permit was addressing only a small fraction of the M-2 zoned properties due to concerns about their viability. He said that if these properties were viable, they would have been purchased and developed long ago, with site plans submitted to their staff.

Mr. Payne said that they were not viable, and this permit was not addressing the needs of the County in a meaningful way. He said that some of these properties were legacy zoned sites, as they were once intended for an airport development along Route 3, but had remained undeveloped for

30 years. He said that they lacked access to public utilities, and the cost to extend electric services to the site was not economically viable.

Mr. Payne said that therefore, he was cautioning against applying this policy too broadly, as it specifically targeted data centers. He said that however, other M-2 uses, such as distribution centers, manufacturing facilities, or recycling facilities, could have a significant impact on the County. He said that these alternatives could operate without a CUP.

Mr. Payne said that he appreciated the idea of referencing the performance standards, as there were many lessons learned from the industry. He said that he believed the industry would be willing to work with them to refine these standards. He said that nevertheless, he encouraged them not to create unnecessary hurdles, especially after the transportation impact fee was passed. He said that this may send the wrong message to their investors.

Mr. Diggs closed the public hearing.

Ms. Barnes motioned, seconded by Mr. Shelton, for the Planning Commission to recommend approval of Proposed Ordinance O25-08.

Ms. Barnes said that she would like to clarify a few points. She said that a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) was essentially an administrative layer that allows them to exert a bit more control. She said that it enabled them to ensure that data centers integrated more smoothly into the community, which she believed was crucial in making their community and County a data-center-friendly environment.

Ms. Barnes said that to achieve this, they needed to ensure that the surrounding community's needs were met. She said that the problems associated with some data centers could be mitigated. She said that she disagreed with the notion that requiring a CUP sent the wrong message. She said that in fact, she believed it sent the right message. She said that they wanted these data centers to be beneficial to the community surrounding them, and a CUP helped them achieve that. She said that to her, a CUP signified that they were a welcoming and supportive data center County.

Ms. Barnes said that the CUP was designed to protect the best interests of the community around data centers, as well as the County as a whole. She said that it was not a rejection of data centers, but rather a way to ensure they were developed in a responsible and community-friendly manner. She said that Mr. Payne mentioned that CUPs were only applied to data centers. She said that however, upon reviewing their district's uses and standards, she found 250 other uses that required CUPs. She said that this was a common practice and a relatively simple step, especially considering the complexity of these projects.

Mr. Shelton said that staff had suggested that this approach had some advantages, and what he had mentioned about reviewing policy development was also beneficial.

Ms. Caudill said that she agreed they should review the data centers. She said that she wanted to ensure that they followed up on this matter and revisited it because she had some concerns about the data centers.

Ms. Sellers said that she intended to vote against the motion. She said that she believed a CUP would not achieve the desired outcome that many people expected. She said that when a M-2 use was paired with an agricultural or residential use, they had established standards in place to mitigate the impact.

Ms. Sellers said that they frequently received requests to waive these standards, which was not ideal. She said that these standards required property owners to plant trees, block access, and implement other measures to minimize the use. She said that given the 24-hour operation of this facility, she was uncertain how they could shape the contract to achieve the expected outcomes.

Ms. Sellers said that they already had noise abatement measures in place, and other standards were already in effect. She said that she was not convinced that a CUP would accomplish what they hoped to achieve, especially considering the potential negative impacts on the business. She said that the M-2 designation was where they had envisioned it would be.

Ms. Sellers said that examining the list of properties on Kings Highway, she noticed that some owners had been in the area for a long time. She said that these properties had been zoned for decades, and now they had the opportunity to sell and profit. She said that some of these individuals were not young and had been watching things around them grow. She said that this CUP would add an additional layer, potentially taking away from their opportunity to make a profit. She said that therefore, she would not be supporting the recommendation for a CUP at this time.

Mr. Apicella said that he agreed with Ms. Barnes' comments. He said that he believed some level of scrutiny was better than none, especially for projects adjacent to their residential developments. He said that while they may not get everything they wanted from the CUP, they would at least provide an opportunity for the public to weigh in on these projects. He said that they would definitely receive benefits from the CUP that they would not get from a by-right approach.

Mr. Apicella said that for example, they recently recommended approval for a solar project, and as part of the conditions, they required the developer to increase the size of the trees to mitigate visual impacts. He said that this would not have happened under a by-right use.

Mr. Apicella called the vote on the Planning Commission to recommend approval of Proposed Ordinance O25-08. The motion passed by voice vote (4-2), with Mr. Bratton absent.

Mr. Apicella adjourned the meeting of the Planning Commission.

Ms. Allen motioned, seconded by Ms. Gary, to deny Proposed Ordinance O25-08.

Ms. Vanuch made a substitute motion, seconded by Ms. Bohmke, to approve Proposed Ordinance O25-08.

Ms. Bohmke said that the primary purpose of this CUP requirement was to provide additional protection for their constituents who lived near the data centers. She said that as the Planning Commission members had eloquently stated, this was indeed an additional layer of protection for them. She said that she felt it was their responsibility to provide this level of protection, and if it resulted in a small increase in the number of items that may impact them, then it was a wise decision to have the CUP. She said that she was definitely in favor of this.

Ms. Vanuch said that she had a question regarding the 13 grandfathered projects. She asked if grandfathering in those projects should be part of her motion.

Mr. Zuraf said that the way the ordinance was worded, it would waive the application for projects including the Cranes Corner Data Center, Enon Road Tech Park, Stafford One Industrial, Austin Ridge Logistics Center, George Washington Village Data Center, Potomac Creek Campus, the Accokeek Center, and the Blaisdell Data Center. He said that it would not include the recently submitted project.

Ms. Vanuch asked how many of those projects would come before the Board.

Mr. Zuraf said that all of those projects were in the rezoning process.

Ms. Vanuch said that none of them were by-right M-2 developments.

Mr. Zuraf said that that was correct; they would all come before the Board for approval.

Mr. English said that he believed this proposed ordinance would provide some extra assurance for any data center sited near residential areas.

Ms. Allen said that she would be voting no on the substitute motion. She said that she had been vocal about this, and even Mr. Zuraf had stated that the data centers would come before the Board to seek rezoning. She said that in her opinion, the last thing they needed to do was send the wrong message to data centers. She said that she could assure them that data center developers were paying attention. She said that the intention behind their actions was just as important as the actions themselves.

Ms. Allen said that even if some data centers were already located there, it did not mean that others would not want to be there. She was saying this because their neighboring counties, such as Caroline and Orange, were actively welcoming these companies with open arms. She said that they had a lengthy discussion about tax rates and the burden.

Ms. Allen said that just as some may have a mandate not to raise taxes, she had a mandate to promote economic development, and she would not create a more burdensome approach to organizations that had already demonstrated their value to them. She said that for example, they had helped them save $60 to $100 million dollars by building utilities infrastructure, which would have otherwise been their responsibility.

Ms. Gary said that she would not be supporting the substitute motion because she did not want to change the Zoning Ordinance in this regard. She said that she believed that they needed to focus on repairing their relationships with the business community and data centers, as some actions taken in the past had caused harm. She said that she was glad that they still had opportunities to work together, and it was not just about the financial benefits. She said that while they did need the money, it was not the only consideration; they must also protect the environment.

Ms. Gary said that they had done the groundwork to identify suitable locations and negotiate water services agreements, and she trusted that their staff was doing excellent work in this area. She said that she believed that they could continue to build on this progress. She said that however, she thought that they should put pressure on state legislators to standardize the process, so they could avoid playing a game of whack-a-mole with applications and potentially achieve more consistency in the future. She said that in conclusion, she was not supporting the substitute motion.

Mr. Diggs said that he wanted to clarify that the concerns raised by constituents regarding currently developing data centers would not be impacted by this proposal. He said that the other issue that struck him was the M-2 land available for potential data center use. He said that if the data centers deemed it viable, they would have already utilized it. He said that one thing he had been looking into since their last meeting was whether data centers would use water from the aquifer or pull it out of the ground if located on an M-2 site. He said that he discovered that this was not an option, which was why he would not be supporting the substitute motion this evening.

Mr. Diggs called the vote on the substitute motion to approve Proposed Ordinance O25-08.

The voting Board tally was:

The Voting Board tally was:

Yea: (2) Bohmke, Vanuch

No: (5) Allen, Diggs, English, Gary, Yeung

Mr. Diggs called the vote on the motion to deny Proposed Ordinance O25-08.

The Voting Board tally was:

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

No: (3) Bohmke, Vanuch, Yeung

RECESS

The Board recessed at 10:12 p.m. and reconvened at 10:18 p.m.

PRESENTATIONS/REPORTS BY DEPARTMENTS

ITEM 9. PLANNING AND ZONING; CONSIDER GRANTING AN INGRESS-EGRESS EASEMENT ON COUNTY-OWNED PROPERTY, TAX MAP PARCEL NO. 47-39C, FOR THE BENEFIT OF TAX MAP PARCEL NO. 47-39I; PROPOSED RESOLUTION R25-52

Kathy Baker, Assistant Director of Planning and Zoning, said that this item was for granting an easement on County-owned property. She said that it pertained to an existing driveway that served an adjacent parcel. She said that the Board had authorized the conveyance of these parcels to the Department of Conservation and Recreation for addition to Crow's Nest Preserve. She said that prior to the conveyance, the County must address the driveway encroachment. She said that specifically, this was the location of the tan-colored parcels in relation to Crow's Nest.

Ms. Baker said that the parcel at the top, surrounded in green, was the Hill property, which had a drain field in its front yard, making it impossible to place a driveway there. She said that the County property had the driveway on it. She said that the proposed easement would ensure continued access to the Hill property. She said that the driveway had been in this location for over 40 years. She said that staff recommended approval of proposed resolution 2552 to grant the easement for continued access.

Mr. Diggs opened the public hearing. He asked if any members of the public wished to address this item.

Kristin Maxson, Falmouth District, said that they were told there was a clerical error from August of last year; there was a problem with the tax map number ending in 39i or 1. She said that in different places, it used 1, and in other places, it used i, but there was no tax map number. She said that at least the public could not see it when they tried to query the GIS. She said that this was a definite stopper to the information and the hearing she had today.

Ms. Maxson said that she did not have a particular position on this. She said that she just knew that egresses required a significant amount of technical and clerical information, and if that information was available, it should be presented. She said that they had been given brief reviews, not much to go on, and this concerned people's properties and land. She said that she was particularly interested in ensuring a fair process.

Mr. Diggs closed the public hearing.

Ms. Gary motioned, seconded by Mr. English, to approve Proposed Resolution R25-52.

The Voting Board tally was:

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

No: (0)

Jon Brindle, Acting Assistant Director of Utilities, said that as previously discussed, they had met with they all to address proposed Ordinance 025-01, which aimed to adopt the Drought Management Plan. He said that the Board had provided comments, requesting that the penalty structure be revised to better distinguish between residential and commercial users.

Mr. Brindle said that they had since addressed this request and were now presenting the revised ordinance for their review and comment. He said that they were not seeking a vote tonight, but rather their agreement to approve the changes they had made. He said that the key modifications included splitting the penalties into separate tiers for residential and commercial users, with residential users facing a $100 per day penalty and commercial users facing a $1,000 per day penalty.

Mr. Brindle said that they had added a provision to address high-end users who may be in violation of emergency ordinances during a drought warning. He said that specifically, if a high-end user was found to have used over 10,000 gallons in a single day, they would be charged $1 per gallon in excess of the allowed amount. He said that they had removed the criminal penalty for violating the drought management plan.

Mr. Brindle said that these were the only changes he had to present. He said that with Board approval, they would update the ordinance and drought plan, and then submit them to the Utilities Commission for a public hearing, followed by a return to the Board for further review and approval, assuming all necessary steps were taken.

Dr. Yeung said that she would like to know how a violation was determined.

Mr. Brindle said that someone would have to observe it or report it, and in the specific instance of the high-end user, they would have to identify the violation and then read the meter in subsequent days.

Ms. Gary said that she appreciated the removal of the criminal penalty. She said that in the discussions leading up to this, she recalled that they had touched on the use of utilities for bathroom facilities. She said that if they were to move forward with a Buc-ee's, with toilets that would require a significant amount of water, she thought it would be beneficial for the Board to consider asking the state to establish limitations on such high-volume users. She said that this could provide a safeguard for their facilities in the future.

Ms. Allen asked if the public hearing with the Utilities Commission was mandatory.

Mr. Brindle said that the Utilities Commission met quarterly. He said that they had previously discussed this matter with the County Attorney. He said that as they moved forward with changing the ordinance, they did require a public hearing with the Utilities Commission.

Ms. Allen said that she was inquiring about the contingency plan in place. She said that she was wondering if there was an alternative mechanism for them to turn to in the event of a quorum issue.

ITEM 10; PLANNING AND ZONING; CONSIDER A REQUEST TO INITIATE A ZONING RECLASSIFICATION APPLICATION TO AMEND PROFFERED CONDITIONS TO ALLOW FOR A TRANSFER OF THE AUTUMN RIDGE COMMUNITY PARK TO THE COUNTY

Mike Zuraf, Director of Planning and Zoning, said that this was regarding the initiation of a zoning reclassification application. He said that the Autumn Ridge Homeowners Association, which owned and maintained a 3-acre community park, was requesting the County consider taking on the ownership and maintenance of their park. He said that the park featured a tennis court and a multipurpose court.

Mr. Zuraf said that the development proffers for this project required the community park, and the site of the park was located immediately to the north of the County-owned Autumn Ridge Community Park. He said that the HOA was requesting the County consider taking on this responsibility, which would require an amendment to the current proffers that required the park to be part of the HOA. He said that the HOA was requesting the County initiate the zoning reclassification application and serve as the applicant in the process.

Mr. Zuraf said that the application for rezoning would follow the standard process, requiring public hearings. He said that staff would prepare and process the application, and there would be no application fees for the Autumn Ridge community in this situation. He said that the HOA noted that they did not have the necessary funds to cover the expenses associated with this amendment. He said that if the Board wished to proceed, they would return to a future meeting with a resolution to initiate the zoning reclassification application for the County to be the applicant.

Ms. Bohmke said that she would like to know if the County had ever taken over a park from an HOA community in a situation similar to this. She said that her primary concern was whether they were setting a precedent. She said that the second question she had was regarding the costs and repairs associated with the project, particularly the cost of replacing the tennis courts.

Ms. Bohmke said that she would like to know if the County had sufficient funds to undertake this project. She said that most importantly, she was concerned about the potential precedent that could be set if this project failed in the future, and whether the County would be willing to take on a project like this that was originally part of an HOA community.

Mr. Zuraf said that he was writing down these questions and they would be revisited, as this issue would need to be brought back to the Board with a resolution. He said that they could then bring the answers to these questions and discuss them further.

Ms. Gary said that in regards to Ms. Bohmke’s question about precedent, she recalled her attempts to get a deal worked out with Brooke Fire Station to turn it into a community center, which was unsuccessful. She said that considering that utilizing that County facility was unable to occur, she wondered how feasible this request was. She said that she had other questions she would provide to staff as well for their future discussion.

Ms. Vanuch said that she had similar comments to Ms. Bohmke's concern regarding the fiscal impacts of this proposal. She said that having driven by the park, she had noticed it was not well-maintained. She said that she saw this as a shift in responsibility from the HOA to the County, and then potentially coming after them for proffer amendments.

Ms. Vanuch said that this reminded her of a previous instance where the County brought forward a proposal, and they were required to bring forward a proffer amendment. She said that in the Apple Grove HOA case, the developer did not have to pay, but the HOA was still responsible for maintaining the property, which was in a flood zone and required significant annual funding to clean up. She said that the HOA was unable to secure the necessary signatures to remove the requirement for tennis courts, and the proposal ultimately died.

Ms. Vanuch said that she believed this set a very dangerous precedent and highlighted the need for careful consideration. She said that as Ms. Gary's mentioned, hey had previously shut down acquisitions of the fire station due to similar concerns. She said that this proposal would add to their costs, and she was not in favor of moving forward or sponsoring the proffer amendment. She said that it was essential to recognize that this was not a County park, and it would divert funds away from their existing parks, which were already struggling to receive adequate funding.

Dr. Yeung said that she understood there was a $600,000 investment in the small 3-acre park next to the dog park. She said that it was located near another park, which was already well-used by the community. She said that as someone who had lived in Garrisonville for over 30 years, Autumn Ridge could not access the park because there was no sidewalk and the dangerous road curve.

Dr. Yeung said that she recalled there was a lot of eagerness last year for pickleball, which was something to consider. She said that while she understood that the existing park was already a valuable resource, she believed they had a responsibility to their constituents who paid taxes and expected them to prioritize their needs. She said that given the emphasis on conservation and the size of the parcel, it was something to consider.

Dr. Yeung said that she believed the HOA was requesting the County to initiate this project because they were not utilizing it. She said that Mr. Southall, who had been working on this for a couple of years, was the driving force behind it and therefore she believed it was a good project.

Dr. Yeung said that she had been informed about it last December and received detailed information. She said that taking care of their communities was part of their responsibility, and she could stand behind this initiative. She said that she hoped that at some point, they could all agree that this was a worthwhile project. She said that Autumn Ridge had already invested significant time and effort into it. She said that the park was currently being used by the community, and it was located right there.

Dr. Yeung said that the park was heavily used by the community and it would be easy to maintain. She said that it was just a basketball court, tennis court, with potential for pickleball and a dog park on the rest of the three acres. She said that there were already proffers in place for a dog park. She said that g that they were already maintaining the Austin Ridge Park, with a pool around the corner as well, she did not see why they could not take care of their community and provide a better experience for Autumn Ridge residents.

Ms. Allen said that she agreed with Ms. Bohmke's statement and, in fact, she had mentioned this before when Ms. Gary brought up her topic. She said that they had budgetary constraints. She said that for some of the other projects, they had found proffers that could cover the costs of renovations, landscaping, and other expenses, so she was in favor of such projects if they could find proffers that would completely cover the costs. She said that their parks were underfunded, and they were constantly receiving requests to expand park services, which they could not do without additional funding.

Ms. Allen said that she did not think it was prudent for them to acquire a new facility that would require renovations, as they could not allow it to remain in a substandard condition. She said that it had to meet certain standards and codes. She said that if there were proffers directly tied to the project that would make the line item zero, she would be in favor of it. She said that her concern was that Austin Ridge had been around as an HOA for a long time and they had not been proactive at addressing this issue.

Dr. Yeung said that Autumn Ridge was now an older community; the children currently using the park were constituents from outside the HOA community. She said that the County was already using this facility; they should continue to do that.

Ms. Allen said that she did not want to set a precedent of the County taking over facilities because an HOA did not want to deal with it any longer. She said that in terms of paying for renovating and upkeeping this park, she could not support this proposal.

Mr. Diggs said that listening to Ms. Gary talk about repurposing the fire station into a community center, he understood it was denied, but he would likely have supported establishing a community center there because he knew the area needed one. He said that he saw this as an opportunity to acquire some land and provide this community with an amenity, but he heard both sides of the conversation and did not sense strong support. He confirmed there was consensus from the Board to not move forward with the zoning reclassification application for the Autumn Ridge Community Park.

REPORTS BY BOARD MEMBERS

Ms. Gary said that she wanted to remind everyone that last year they had won the Spring Fever 5K. She said that she would be participating, either running, jogging, or walking, and hopefully not wheezing too much. She said that she was aiming to outpace the child wearing Crocs who had beaten her the previous year. She said that she would be there to support the team. She said that they had had a great turnout from the district last year, and it had been a lot of fun. She said that she wanted to encourage everyone to do it again. To register for the Spring Fever 5K, visit runsignup.com and look for the Spring Fever 5K event.

Ms. Gary said that she was organizing a community meeting in the Brooke area to provide updates on the federal grant funding situation. She said that she was still waiting for more concrete information, but she was working on scheduling a meeting at the fire station as soon as she had the information. She said that she wanted to inform everyone that the age-in-place legislation had been brought up again. She said that she thought they should consider it as a legislative priority, as other states had implemented similar measures that benefited their seniors. She said that she wanted to address the budget concerns and the idea of not wanting to be a burden.

Ms. Gary said that it was essential that they acknowledge the challenges they were facing and support each other. She said that it was heartening to see that many people were willing to plan ahead and take care of themselves and their loved ones. She said that however, she wanted to shift their focus to the people around them and consider how they could share the burdens of others and show compassion.

Ms. Gary said that as they navigated the challenges they faced at every level of government and in their community, it was essential to remember that these difficulties were not temporary and would continue to affect them. She said that life was full of stress and intensity right now, and it was crucial that they support one another. She said that she encouraged everyone to be kind and bear one another's burdens if possible.

Ms. Gary said that they often got passionate and heated about issues, but they could also move past their disagreements and continue to work together. She said that she believed that if they could do this, anyone could. She said that she would like to thank Chairman Diggs again for leading the way in their discussions today and for fostering a spirit of collaboration and understanding.

Mr. English said that on March 20, a DARE basketball fundraiser would take place at Colonial Forge High School. He said that tickets were $5 each or $20 for a package of five tickets.

Dr. Yeung said that she would like to bring up two key points from the meetings she has attended over the past couple of weeks. She said that for the Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (FAMPO) meeting yesterday, the state informed them that their CMAQ and STBG funding for 2025 through 2030 would be reduced by $2.1 million for the region. She said that as a result, their new funding for FY2031 would be lower than last year's allocation, and it was essential to keep this in mind.

Dr. Yeung said that regarding the library, the director was seeking legal representation due to operational needs and wanted to touch base with the Library Board. She said that she wanted to bring this to their attention, specifically regarding the library's interest in utilizing the Virginia Risk Sharing Association for HR and related issues, including legal actions and agreements. She said that she had previously mentioned that County Attorney McClendon had stated that the County did not provide support for the library in this regard, so she believed it was crucial for the library to find its own representation. She said that she just wanted to inform the Board of her position on this matter.

Dr. Yeung said that on a personal note, her son coached soccer and his team won the St. Patrick’s Tournament in the U11 division.

Ms. Allen said that Mr. Diggs and she, along with County Admin staff, had the pleasure of welcoming their new base commander to the County and establishing a line of communication and relationship. She said that on behalf of Stafford County, she would like to extend her congratulations and welcome to Colonel Colgate at Quantico.

Ms. Allen said that they looked forward to building on the relationship that Colonel Brooks established under his leadership and under his successor's leadership as well. She said that she would like to bring the Board's attention to the commuter choice grant that had been funding their OmniRide bus. She said that the grant was set to expire in about two weeks, and they would be attending the Potomac Rappahannock Transportation Commission meeting to reapply for funding.

Ms. Allen said that if they did not receive the grant, the buses would cease to exist, which would be a significant development given the President's mandate to have federal workers return to the office. She said that as a member of the subcommittee responsible for applying for these grants, she would keep the Board informed about this situation. She said that they would also be reapplying for the grant through PTRC, with the hope of securing funding, which would eliminate the need for an additional mode of transportation.

Ms. Allen said that she would like to remind the Board that the Staffordboro sidewalk project would be going out to bid at the end of the day, and the envelope project would begin in a couple of weeks. She said that as more information became available, she would continue to keep the Board updated, as this project would have significant implications for pedestrian and vehicular traffic. She said that they would be here while everyone was on spring break, and she would like to extend her wishes to SCPS and all the families for a great spring break, and she hoped the kids got a well-deserved rest and returned ready for their SOLs.

Mr. Diggs said that he wanted to remind the district and the community that he would be hosting a town hall meeting on March 27 at 6:00 p.m. at Stafford High School, and he invited everyone to attend. He said that representatives including Senator Durant, Delegate Cole, and other officials would be present to share information and address concerns. He said that he had recently had the opportunity to visit a data center and found it to be very informative.

Mr. Diggs said that he had gained a firsthand understanding of the issues surrounding data centers, including noise, power, aesthetics, and more. He said that data centers were constantly evolving, upgrading technology, and addressing concerns as they built new campuses. He said that he was proud of the Board for their efforts that evening, which were passionate but respectful.

Mr. Diggs said that he appreciated the hard work and dedication of the staff, who supported them and their constituents every day. He said that he also wanted to thank the County Administrator for his efforts in presenting the budget and impressive reduction of $4 million. He said that he appreciated the support of staff, including Deputy Kulbeth, who had been protecting them and keeping them safe.

Mr. Diggs said that he finally wanted to apologize to Ms. Maxson; the Board appreciated her dedication and attention to detail.

<u>ADJOURNMENT</u>

The Board adjourned its meeting at 10:55 p.m.

William H. Ashton, II
County Administrator

Public Comment Form

COMPLETE #115

CREATED

PUBLIC
Mar 17th 2025, 3:23:02 pm

IP ADDRESS

71.124.4.19

*** Name**

Anthony Kelly

*** Address**

305 Ingleside Drive
Fredericksurg
Virginia
22405
United States

*** Email**

anthonyjkelly@outlook.com

Election District

George Washington

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

1. Amendment to the Zoning Ordinance – Proposed Ordinance O25-08 would amend Stafford County Code Sec. 28-35, “Table of uses and standards” to require a conditional use permit for a data center in the M-2, Heavy Industrial Zoning District.

*** Online Comments:**

As a resident of the Ingleside-Belmont Hills neighborhood, I am strongly opposed to the proposed zoning change from Urban Commercial and Agricultural to Heavy Industrial for the proposed Industrial Data Center Campus in Stafford County.

I am deeply concerned about a number of adverse impacts on our community, especially the damaging environmental impacts to our beautiful Rappahannock River and the surrounding area that construction and wastewater will cause. This type of construction will also add traffic congestion to an already congested Route 17 and increased traffic through our neighborhood on Lendall Lane, which is already used as a shortcut affecting the wellbeing of those who live in the neighborhood. The noise of a 24/7/365 operation will naturally and negatively impact the neighborhood and quality of life in a historically peaceful area.

Finally, Data Center technology may come and go, raising future concerns about the use of this wonderful area for other “Heavy Industrial” operations.

As a Stafford County resident, I ask you to please oppose this proposed rezoning.

Thank you.
Anthony Kelly

Public Comment Form

COMPLETE #114

CREATED

PUBLIC
Mar 17th 2025, 2:57:03 pm

IP ADDRESS

70.109.57.76

* Name

Renee Kendall

* Address

105 Denison Street
Fredericksburg
VA
22406
United States

* Email

Reneezaal@gmail.com

Election District

George Washington

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

Budget

* Online Comments:

No increased taxes. Out tax dollars need to be spent responsibly and accountable on urgent "needs" not just "wants". We all "want" things but wants are not in "our" budgets needs. This money comes out of our pockets, your constituents that you are responsible to. The majority of the budget already goes to the schools with increases over the past couple of years. Where is the return on our investment? There are other schools that receive less money per pupil and yet they rank higher than Stafford. So the money can't be the problem. Maybe we need a type of DOGE to clean up Stafford County to get rid of the fraud, waste and abuse. I attended a recent local meeting where Senators and Delegates spoke. They told us the schools have plenty of money, they just keep asking for more each year. I have heard that teachers don't want higher taxes and that they have seen the waste and a lot of problems. They don't speak out for fear of retribution. I live in a 55+ Community, Seniors live on a fixed income. We are taxed to death. Many of us moved from MD and NOVA (including my husband and I) to the Fredericksburg area to get away from the expense, congestion and hub bub of the Washington Metropolitan area. We don't want to be a NOVA extention. Thank you for serving our Stafford constituents. Please consider our plea not to raise our taxes again this year. I know of some who have lived here their whole life that can no longer afford to live here if their taxes go up. It's so sad for life long residents.

Public Comment Form

COMPLETE #113

CREATED

PUBLIC
Mar 17th 2025, 2:54:10 pm

IP ADDRESS

184.191.120.159

*** Name**

Ann Harry

*** Address**

308 INGLESIDE DR
FREDERICKSBRG
Virginia
22405
United States

*** Email**

DrL7Bob@aol.com

Election District

George Washington

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

Conditional use Permit for Data Centers

*** Online Comments:**

I urge you to strengthen the requirements for constructing data centers in Stafford County. The demands for water and electricity and the noise associated with data centers pose quality of life issues which should be carefully considered. Please support the proposed ordinance to require a conditional use permit for data centers in areas zoned heavy industrial.

Public Comment Form

COMPLETE #112

CREATED

PUBLIC
Mar 17th 2025, 2:12:59 pm

IP ADDRESS

184.191.124.53

*** Name**

Jennifer Canfield

*** Address**

605 Lendall Ln
Fredericksburg
VA
22405
United States

*** Email**

cancatchall@gmail.com

Election District

Falmouth

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

CONSIDER AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND STAFFORD COUNTY CODE SEC. 28-35, “TABLE OF USES AND STANDARDS” TO MODIFY HOW DATA CENTERS ARE PERMITTED PROPOSED ORDINANCE O25-08

*** Online Comments:**

Hello. I would like to submit my public comments on the topic of new data centers and proposed zoning reclassification from "agricultural use" to "heavy industrial" - specifically for the proposed Blaisdell Data Center parcel(s). I hold firm that zoning for these data centers should be "special use" to allow for thoroughly examining their impact on the environment and surrounding neighborhoods on a case by case basis. I live in Belmont Hills which is directly up Ingleside Dr from the Rappahannock River near the Belmont Estate and near the historic Hunter's Iron Works site. According the proposed "Blaisdell Data Center" maps that have been presented by Mr. Payne, my front door would be approximately 1200ft from one of the new data center buildings. Families live in our older established neighborhood to tuck away from the commercial hustle and bustle of our County. Neither our neighborhood nor the developments of Old Forge and Rappahannock Landing ever anticipated having a 180 acre complex jam packed in the only open area of land between us. I doubt that any of you all would want 1.5M square feet of commercial acreage football field's length from your front door - even closer for some of my other neighbors. Local advocates and agencies like FOR can demonstrate the historical significance of our area and how we need to protect it. Data centers should not just be outlined and dropped onto maps like jigsaw puzzles wherever there is open space. Data centers are going to become a necessary evil, however, there are locations in this county that should be considered so the centers are not dropped in the middle of neighborhoods. These centers need to be reviewed location by location to gain insight on the entirety of its impact on property value and electrical grids and the environment. Given that there are already numerous proffers planned for the Blaisdell Data Center, that fully illustrates that they already know the negative impact of this data center on the surrounding area since they are already working to counteract it. I submit to the Board that they vote for "special use" zoning for these data centers to protect our families and our neighborhoods. Thank you-

Public Comment Form

COMPLETE #111

CREATED

PUBLIC
Mar 17th 2025, 1:46:55 pm

IP ADDRESS

108.44.246.112

*** Name**

John Stevens

*** Address**

5 Walter Circle
Fredericksburg
VA
22405-2363
United States

*** Email**

unopassos@aol.com

Election District

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

Data Process Centers

*** Online Comments:**

My wife and I have lived in Ingleside for more than 40 years. We are opposed to any amendments to the zoning ordinances that will result in the location of data centers in proximity to residential or commercial centers of the county. We ask that you only act in our best interests to protect the peace and tranquility of our homes.

Public Comment Form

COMPLETE #110

CREATED

PUBLIC
Mar 17th 2025, 1:27:43 pm

IP ADDRESS

70.109.57.76

* Name

David Kendall

* Address

105 Drnison St

Fredericksburg

VA

22406

United States

* Email

Davekendall1@yahoo.com

Election District

George Washington

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

Real estate tax increase

* Online Comments:

I'm commenting to urge the Stafford County BOS to DISAPPROVE a real estate tax increase on Stafford County residents.

A real estate tax increase has a large impact on citizens, especially seniors citizens on a fixed income. For example, a $300 real estate tax increase can consume 20% of a senior couples Social Security cost of living increase and 40% of a single senior homeowners cost of living increase. That's not our only tax burden as vehicle taxes also increase as well as other living cost increases.

Please ask the school board to audit their operations and look for ways to reduce the schools budget.

I also encourage the BOS to consider approving new business to help bear our school's cost. I know that the potential Buc-ee's project has its opponents, but I urge the Board to work with Buc-ee's to build in Stafford County to help alleviate some of the school tax burden on Stafford residents.

Public Comment Form

COMPLETE #109

CREATED

PUBLIC
Mar 17th 2025, 1:23:33 pm

IP ADDRESS

70.109.57.171

* Name

Nancy Minor

* Address

315 Ingleside Dr

Falmouth

VA

22405

United States

* Email

nancy.minor74@gmail.com

Election District

George Washington

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

1. Amendment to the Zoning Ordinance

* Online Comments:

YES, I agreed with the Proposed Ordinance O25-08
to amend Stafford County Code Sec. 28-35, "Table of uses and standards"
to require a conditional use permit for a data center in the M-2, Heavy Industrial Zoning District.

I would also like to mention that I strongly oppose the proposed "re-zoning application" off Olde Forge Rd for a Industrial Data Center Campus. This data center & 6.77 acre "power station" is being squeezed into an area that will effect 3 neighborhoods (Olde Forge townhouses, the trailer park off Rt 17 and the neighborhood behind Belmont.

Public Comment Form

COMPLETE #108

CREATED

PUBLIC
Mar 17th 2025, 12:49:53 pm

IP ADDRESS

38.73.227.214

*** Name**

Susan Blackwood

*** Address**

317 Ingleside Drive
Fredericksburg
VA
22405
United States

*** Email**

blackwoodsusan@rocketmail.com

Election District

Falmouth

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

Amendment to the Zoning Ordinance

*** Online Comments:**

Dear Board of Supervisors - I live in the Ingleside subdivision. As you know, there is currently an effort by TC Blaisdell to change the zoning of his property from B-2 and A-1 to M-2 (Heavy Industrial). Allowing a data center, adjacent to three neighborhoods, should never be allowed. Not only will the peace and quiet be destroyed in Old Forge, Ingleside and Belmont, but the forest and wildlife that will be destroyed can never be replaced. It's also too close to our beloved Rappahannock River and numerous tributaries and streams. The argument presented by the attorney, Charles Payne, is that a data center is better than more townhouses. But that land is not zoned residential, so that is a moot argument. Please consider this one, very important fact when you vote - would you vote to allow a data center right next to your neighborhood? Of course not! So please do not vote to destroy the natural resources and beautiful area where so many of us live. Thank you for your attention to this matter. Susan Blackwood

Tiffernev A. Williams

From: Wufoo <no-reply@wufoo.com>
Sent: Monday, March 17, 2025 4:08 PM
To: Mark A. Kaminski; Andrew L. Spence; Taylor S. Dunn; Tifferney A. Williams
Subject: Public Comment Form [#116]

Name *	Sylvia Melendez
Address *	2 Walter circle Falmouth VA falmouth, VA 22405 United States
Email *	smelendez18@comcast.net
Election District	George Washington
Topic (please see the Public Hearings page for specific topics coming up) *	Data Center proposal- M2
Online Comments: *	Greetings, If this is a vote. I vote No Data Center. It will not complement Falmouth's Rich History, and so much more. Pease see email sent on Fri, March 7th. Thank you for having the Town Hall for the Data Center issues.

Taylor S. Dunn

From: Wufoo <no-reply@wufoo.com>
Sent: Tuesday, March 4, 2025 11:27 AM
To: Mark A. Kaminski; Andrew L. Spence; Taylor S. Dunn; Tifferney A. Williams
Subject: Public Comment Form [#105]

Name *	Justice Smith
Address *	Puri Lane N/a Stafford, Virginia 22554 United States
Email *	jus2garden@gmail.com
Election District	Aquia
Topic (please see the Public Hearings page for specific topics coming up) *	Backyard Chickens
Online Comments: *	Can Stafford reconsider allowing properties zoned residential to have 4-6 chickens, no roosters like Fredericksburg? Its several cities within the area that allows it and have no issues. With the economy getting worse, it would help some of TREMENDOUSLY!

Taylor S. Dunn

From: Wufoo <no-reply@wufoo.com>
Sent: Monday, March 17, 2025 9:55 AM
To: Mark A. Kaminski; Andrew L. Spence; Taylor S. Dunn; Tifferney A. Williams
Subject: Public Comment Form [#107]

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) * The budget, reduction in real estate taxes and NO Buc-ees in Stafford

Online Comments: *

Good morning BoS,

It is cleat that the residents of Stafford are tired of seeing our real estate taxes and property taxes continue to grow. The county needs to start an initiative to reign in waste, fraud and abuse and protect our hard earned money. This is not sustainable for primary/homestead properties to see this kind of increase in taxes. There needs to be a cap for homestead properties where the increase is minimal every year. My real estate taxes have more than doubled in the last six years. The county must protect primary residences from this kind of tax burden and cut back on expenses. The objective is to cut the budget in half and privatize where ever possible. A local "DOGE" is needed with layoffs and restructuring at all positions. For starters, an independent auditor is needed to see where tax dollars are being wasted, stolen or misspent. This includes at public schools, first responders and other county positions. This bureaucracy has to be trimmed immensely, and it's your responsibility as public servants to protect our tax dollars. We want less services and more savings equaling less taxes. The residents of Stafford know how to spend their money and don't want a heavy tax burden. Less taxes, less services while ending the county bureaucracy. NO TO BIG COUNTY BUDGETS! AND YES TO LESS TAXES!!

Many residents here do not want the AWFUL Beaver here in Stafford and my petition has over 1,600 signatures and counting voicing their concern about Buc-ees in Stafford off exit 140. This is the link for my petition: (https://chng.it/SbydMtPnGf) please also read the comments made by Stafford residents. I have spoken in front of the BoS a couple times and so has many residents of the local community. We pay a lot in county taxes and do not want to see this monstrosity here for all the reason listed in my petition including more traffic congestion, higher crime, higher taxes, disruption of a peaceful communities and environmental concerns. We don't need the AWFUL Beaver here and cut back the county budget to have less taxes. THE BUC STOPS HERE!! NO BUC-EES in Stafford!! LESS SPENDING and LESS TAXES in Stafford. Elections are coming up and EVERYONE IS WATCHING.

Thank you,

Ignacio J. Esteban

Austin Ridge Resident

Taylor S. Dunn

From: Wufoo <no-reply@wufoo.com>
Sent: Thursday, March 13, 2025 3:54 PM
To: Mark A. Kaminski; Andrew L. Spence; Taylor S. Dunn; Tifferney A. Williams
Subject: Public Comment Form [#106]

Name *	Margaret Beckwith
Address *	81 Peacock Station Drive Fredericksburg, Va 22406 United States
Email *	m_beckwith@Verizon.net
Election District	Hartwood
Topic (please see the Public Hearings page for specific topics coming up) *	Taxes
Online Comments: *	No increase in property taxes! The schools and county need to do their jobs at the current funding level. Job losses in the area and inflation are hitting Stafford County very hard. Retirees on fixed budgets cannot continue to absorb these increases. Residents cannot continue to fund a County and school system that does not practice fiscal constraints. Thank you!

Public Comment Form

COMPLETE #117

CREATED

PUBLIC
Mar 17th 2025, 4:24:30 pm

IP ADDRESS

107.77.202.154

*** Name**

Christina Mellors

*** Address**

310 Ingleside Drive
Fredericksburg
VA
22405
United States

*** Email**

chrispanya@yahoo.com

Election District

George Washington

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

Data Center Ordinance (March 18 2025)

*** Online Comments:**

Please stand up for the residents of Stafford County in support of the ordinance requiring a CUP for data centers. These are high dollar projects with high impact to the community and the environment. This is not a resident putting a shed on his property; it should not be easy. Due to the large revenues data centers provide, it is tempting for the county to approve them. An ordinance requiring a conditional use permit rather than by right development on heavy industrial land would serve as a check and balance in the process When they are close to residential areas they should have to go through a stringent review and I would question the motives of anyone who would deny the residence of Stafford County this courtesy. Fairfax County has been impacted by data center development for a longer period of time and their leaders decided this was necessary. Stafford County has the opportunity to benefit from Fairfax's experience by following their lead and doing the same.

Public Comment Form

COMPLETE #115

CREATED

PUBLIC
Mar 17th 2025, 3:23:02 pm

IP ADDRESS

71.124.4.19

* Name

Anthony Kelly

* Address

305 Ingleside Drive
Fredericksurg
Virginia
22405
United States

* Email

anthonyjkelly@outlook.com

Election District

George Washington

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

1. Amendment to the Zoning Ordinance – Proposed Ordinance O25-08 would amend Stafford County Code Sec. 28-35, "Table of uses and standards" to require a conditional use permit for a data center in the M-2, Heavy Industrial Zoning District.

* Online Comments:

As a resident of the Ingleside-Belmont Hills neighborhood, I am strongly opposed to the proposed zoning change from Urban Commercial and Agricultural to Heavy Industrial for the proposed Industrial Data Center Campus in Stafford County.

I am deeply concerned about a number of adverse impacts on our community, especially the damaging environmental impacts to our beautiful Rappahannock River and the surrounding area that construction and wastewater will cause. This type of construction will also add traffic congestion to an already congested Route 17 and increased traffic through our neighborhood on Lendall Lane, which is already used as a shortcut affecting the wellbeing of those who live in the neighborhood. The noise of a 24/7/365 operation will naturally and negatively impact the neighborhood and quality of life in a historically peaceful area.

Finally, Data Center technology may come and go, raising future concerns about the use of this wonderful area for other "Heavy Industrial" operations.

As a Stafford County resident, I ask you to please oppose this proposed rezoning.

Thank you.
Anthony Kelly

Public Comment Form

COMPLETE #114

CREATED

PUBLIC
Mar 17th 2025, 2:57:03 pm

IP ADDRESS

70.109.57.76

*** Name**

Renee Kendall

*** Address**

105 Denison Street
Fredericksburg
VA
22406
United States

*** Email**

Reneezaal@gmail.com

Election District

George Washington

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

Budget

*** Online Comments:**

No increased taxes. Out tax dollars need to be spent responsibly and accountable on urgent "needs" not just "wants". We all "want" things but wants are not in "our" budgets needs. This money comes out of our pockets, your constituents that you are responsible to. The majority of the budget already goes to the schools with increases over the past couple of years. Where is the return on our investment? There are other schools that receive less money per pupil and yet they rank higher than Stafford. So the money can't be the problem. Maybe we need a type of DOGE to clean up Stafford County to get rid of the fraud, waste and abuse. I attended a recent local meeting where Senators and Delegates spoke. They told us the schools have plenty of money, they just keep asking for more each year. I have heard that teachers don't want higher taxes and that they have seen the waste and a lot of problems. They don't speak out for fear of retribution. I live in a 55+ Community, Seniors live on a fixed income. We are taxed to death. Many of us moved from MD and NOVA (including my husband and I) to the Fredericksburg area to get away from the expense, congestion and hub bub of the Washington Metropolitan area. We don't want to be a NOVA extention. Thank you for serving our Stafford constituents. Please consider our plea not to raise our taxes again this year. I know of some who have lived here their whole life that can no longer afford to live here if their taxes go up. It's so sad for life long residents.

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COMPLETE #113

CREATED

PUBLIC
Mar 17th 2025, 2:54:10 pm

IP ADDRESS

184.191.120.159

*** Name**

Ann Harry

*** Address**

308 INGLESIDE DR
FREDERICKSBRG
Virginia
22405
United States

*** Email**

DrL7Bob@aol.com

Election District

George Washington

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

Conditional use Permit for Data Centers

*** Online Comments:**

I urge you to strengthen the requirements for constructing data centers in Stafford County. The demands for water and electricity and the noise associated with data centers pose quality of life issues which should be carefully considered. Please support the proposed ordinance to require a conditional use permit for data centers in areas zoned heavy industrial.

Public Comment Form

COMPLETE #112

CREATED

PUBLIC
Mar 17th 2025, 2:12:59 pm

IP ADDRESS

184.191.124.53

* Name

Jennifer Canfield

* Address

605 Lendall Ln
Fredericksburg
VA
22405
United States

* Email

cancatchall@gmail.com

Election District

Falmouth

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

CONSIDER AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND STAFFORD COUNTY CODE SEC. 28-35, "TABLE OF USES AND STANDARDS" TO MODIFY HOW DATA CENTERS ARE PERMITTED PROPOSED ORDINANCE O25-08

* Online Comments:

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Public Comment Form

COMPLETE #111

CREATED

PUBLIC
Mar 17th 2025, 1:46:55 pm

IP ADDRESS

108.44.246.112

*** Name**

John Stevens

*** Address**

5 Walter Circle
Fredericksburg
VA
22405-2363
United States

*** Email**

unopassos@aol.com

Election District

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

Data Process Centers

*** Online Comments:**

My wife and I have lived in Ingleside for more than 40 years. We are opposed to any amendments to the zoning ordinances that will result in the location of data centers in proximity to residential or commercial centers of the county. We ask that you only act in our best interests to protect the peace and tranquility of our homes.

Public Comment Form

COMPLETE #110

CREATED

PUBLIC
Mar 17th 2025, 1:27:43 pm

IP ADDRESS

70.109.57.76

* Name

David Kendall

* Address

105 Drnison St
Fredericksburg
VA
22406
United States

* Email

Davekendall1@yahoo.com

Election District

George Washington

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

Real estate tax increase

* Online Comments:

I'm commenting to urge the Stafford County BOS to DISAPPROVE a real estate tax increase on Stafford County residents.

A real estate tax increase has a large impact on citizens, especially seniors citizens on a fixed income. For example, a $300 real estate tax increase can consume 20% of a senior couples Social Security cost of living increase and 40% of a single senior homeowners cost of living increase. That's not our only tax burden as vehicle taxes also increase as well as other living cost increases.

Please ask the school board to audit their operations and look for ways to reduce the schools budget.

I also encourage the BOS to consider approving new business to help bear our school's cost. I know that the potential Buc-ee's project has its opponents, but I urge the Board to work with Buc-ee's to build in Stafford County to help alleviate some of the school tax burden on Stafford residents.

Public Comment Form

COMPLETE #109

CREATED

PUBLIC
Mar 17th 2025, 1:23:33 pm

IP ADDRESS

70.109.57.171

*** Name**

Nancy Minor

*** Address**

315 Ingleside Dr
Falmouth
VA
22405
United States

*** Email**

nancy.minor74@gmail.com

Election District

George Washington

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

1. Amendment to the Zoning Ordinance

*** Online Comments:**

YES, I agreed with the Proposed Ordinance O25-08
to amend Stafford County Code Sec. 28-35, "Table of uses and standards"
to require a conditional use permit for a data center in the M-2, Heavy Industrial Zoning District.

I would also like to mention that I strongly oppose the proposed "re-zoning application" off Olde Forge Rd for a Industrial Data Center Campus. This data center & 6.77 acre "power station" is being squeezed into an area that will effect 3 neighborhoods (Olde Forge townhouses, the trailer park off Rt 17 and the neighborhood behind Belmont.

Public Comment Form

COMPLETE #108

CREATED

PUBLIC
Mar 17th 2025, 12:49:53 pm

IP ADDRESS

38.73.227.214

* Name

Susan Blackwood

* Address

317 Ingleside Drive
Fredericksburg
VA
22405
United States

* Email

blackwoodsusan@rocketmail.com

Election District

Falmouth

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

Amendment to the Zoning Ordinance

* Online Comments:

Dear Board of Supervisors - I live in the Ingleside subdivision. As you know, there is currently an effort by TC Blaisdell to change the zoning of his property from B-2 and A-1 to M-2 (Heavy Industrial). Allowing a data center, adjacent to three neighborhoods, should never be allowed. Not only will the peace and quiet be destroyed in Old Forge, Ingleside and Belmont, but the forest and wildlife that will be destroyed can never be replaced. It's also too close to our beloved Rappahannock River and numerous tributaries and streams. The argument presented by the attorney, Charles Payne, is that a data center is better than more townhouses. But that land is not zoned residential, so that is a moot argument. Please consider this one, very important fact when you vote - would you vote to allow a data center right next to your neighborhood? Of course not! So please do not vote to destroy the natural resources and beautiful area where so many of us live. Thank you for your attention to this matter. Susan Blackwood

Tifferney A. Williams

From: Wufoo <no-reply@wufoo.com>
Sent: Monday, March 17, 2025 4:08 PM
To: Mark A. Kaminski; Andrew L. Spence; Taylor S. Dunn; Tifferney A. Williams
Subject: Public Comment Form [#116]

Name *	Sylvia Melendez
Address *	2 Walter circle Falmouth VA falmouth, VA 22405 United States
Email *	smelendez18@comcast.net
Election District	George Washington
Topic (please see the Public Hearings page for specific topics coming up) *	Data Center proposal- M2
Online Comments: *	Greetings, If this is a vote. I vote No Data Center. It will not complement Falmouth's Rich History, and so much more. Pease see email sent on Fri, March 7th. Thank you for having the Town Hall for the Data Center issues.

Taylor S. Dunn

From: Wufoo <no-reply@wufoo.com>
Sent: Tuesday, March 4, 2025 11:27 AM
To: Mark A. Kaminski; Andrew L. Spence; Taylor S. Dunn; Tifferney A. Williams
Subject: Public Comment Form [#105]

Name *	Justice Smith
Address *	Puri Lane N/a Stafford, Virginia 22554 United States
Email *	jus2garden@gmail.com
Election District	Aquia
Topic (please see the Public Hearings page for specific topics coming up) *	Backyard Chickens
Online Comments: *	Can Stafford reconsider allowing properties zoned residential to have 4-6 chickens, no roosters like Fredericksburg? Its several cities within the area that allows it and have no issues. With the economy getting worse, it would help some of TREMENDOUSLY!

Taylor S. Dunn

From: Wufoo <no-reply@wufoo.com>
Sent: Monday, March 17, 2025 9:55 AM
To: Mark A. Kaminski; Andrew L. Spence; Taylor S. Dunn; Tifferney A. Williams
Subject: Public Comment Form [#107]

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) * The budget, reduction in real estate taxes and NO Buc-ees in Stafford

Online Comments: *

Good morning BoS,

It is cleat that the residents of Stafford are tired of seeing our real estate taxes and property taxes continue to grow. The county needs to start an initiative to reign in waste, fraud and abuse and protect our hard earned money. This is not sustainable for primary/homestead properties to see this kind of increase in taxes. There needs to be a cap for homestead properties where the increase is minimal every year. My real estate taxes have more than doubled in the last six years. The county must protect primary residences from this kind of tax burden and cut back on expenses. The objective is to cut the budget in half and privatize where ever possible. A local "DOGE" is needed with layoffs and restructuring at all positions. For starters, an independent auditor is needed to see where tax dollars are being wasted, stolen or misspent. This includes at public schools, first responders and other county positions. This bureaucracy has to be trimmed immensely, and it's your responsibility as public servants to protect our tax dollars. We want less services and more savings equaling less taxes. The residents of Stafford know how to spend their money and don't want a heavy tax burden. Less taxes, less services while ending the county bureaucracy. NO TO BIG COUNTY BUDGETS! AND YES TO LESS TAXES!!

Many residents here do not want the AWFUL Beaver here in Stafford and my petition has over 1,600 signatures and counting voicing their concern about Buc-ees in Stafford off exit 140. This is the link for my petition: (https://chng.it/SbydMtPnGf) please also read the comments made by Stafford residents. I have spoken in front of the BoS a couple times and so has many residents of the local community. We pay a lot in county taxes and do not want to see this monstrosity here for all the reason listed in my petition including more traffic congestion, higher crime, higher taxes, disruption of a peaceful communities and environmental concerns. We don't need the AWFUL Beaver here and cut back the county budget to have less taxes. THE BUC STOPS HERE!! NO BUC-EES in Stafford!! LESS SPENDING and LESS TAXES in Stafford. Elections are coming up and EVERYONE IS WATCHING.

Thank you,

Ignacio J. Esteban

Austin Ridge Resident

Taylor S. Dunn

From: Wufoo <no-reply@wufoo.com>
Sent: Thursday, March 13, 2025 3:54 PM
To: Mark A. Kaminski; Andrew L. Spence; Taylor S. Dunn; Tifferney A. Williams
Subject: Public Comment Form [#106]

Name *	Margaret Beckwith
Address *	81 Peacock Station Drive Fredericksburg, Va 22406 United States
Email *	m_beckwith@Verizon.net
Election District	Hartwood
Topic (please see the Public Hearings page for specific topics coming up) *	Taxes
Online Comments: *	No increase in property taxes! The schools and county need to do their jobs at the current funding level. Job losses in the area and inflation are hitting Stafford County very hard. Retirees on fixed budgets cannot continue to absorb these increases. Residents cannot continue to fund a County and school system that does not practice fiscal constraints. Thank you!

Public Comment Form

COMPLETE #117

CREATED

PUBLIC
Mar 17th 2025, 4:24:30 pm

IP ADDRESS

107.77.202.154

*** Name**

Christina Mellors

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22405
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*** Email**

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Election District

George Washington

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

Data Center Ordinance (March 18 2025)

*** Online Comments:**

Please stand up for the residents of Stafford County in support of the ordinance requiring a CUP for data centers. These are high dollar projects with high impact to the community and the environment. This is not a resident putting a shed on his property; it should not be easy. Due to the large revenues data centers provide, it is tempting for the county to approve them. An ordinance requiring a conditional use permit rather than by right development on heavy industrial land would serve as a check and balance in the process When they are close to residential areas they should have to go through a stringent review and I would question the motives of anyone who would deny the residence of Stafford County this courtesy. Fairfax County has been impacted by data center development for a longer period of time and their leaders decided this was necessary. Stafford County has the opportunity to benefit from Fairfax's experience by following their lead and doing the same.