

Message to Arlington County Board Members from County Manager Mark Schwartz

November 12, 2020

County Board Members: JFAC Chair Greg Greeley and Vice Chair Kathleen McSweeney shared an outline and proposal for a JFAC-authored public facilities plan for County and APS public facilities with JFAC's County and School Board liaisons. They have also shared a list of names to potentially fill JFAC vacancies. Overall, I feel strongly that we do not have the staff resources to support this effort for the remainder of the fiscal year (through July 2021) and any commitment after that would be dependent on the FY 2022 adopted budget which will not be in place until April 2021. While Greg and Kathleen are respectful of the profound stress we face with COVID, they think a bit of assistance from one staff person can make it work. The work in their outline, to be done well, and to be accurate and thorough, requires staff from virtually every department to be involved, including department heads. Also, I will be proposing cuts in staff as part of the FY 2022 budget. We will be choosing to prioritize work on things like the Clarendon Sector Plan over long-range planning efforts.

While, I want the work of any of our commissions to be useful, given COVID, and given that we are undergoing a generational transformation in how we provide services and use facilities, this is the wrong time to do what is proposed. There is no doubt that some services will remain the same from a physical and facilities perspective, there are many more that may not come back as they once were. We will discuss some of these very issues in our operating budget for FY 2022. I think it would be more beneficial in terms of both advice to the Manager and to the County Board to hold off on this work until we get to the other side of COVID and its financial and service delivery impacts. I would not want an intense amount of effort to go into a document that is then perceived as "sitting on a shelf". An alternative that I have proposed is that the JFAC, out of respect for its talented members, use their skills to work assiduously to advise APS on how other jurisdictions are thinking of integrating online learning permanently into the post-COVID world and how other jurisdictions are

dealing with the intersection between missing middle housing efforts and impacts on public facilities.

This is more than survey work but work that will help us handle two important questions when the time is right. To do this work, I do not think that much, if any, staff assistance is needed. Even if my proposed alternative set of work is not palatable for the JFAC, we have year 2 of at least 3 consecutive years of CIP discussions in the offing. Now is the time to pause work on the JFAC proposal. COVID-19 has reminded us how sometimes a bit of hubris suffuses our long-range planning efforts. JFAC did some difficult and helpful work on options for the Buck/Quincy property. One of them included a potential landing spot for a new Emergency Operations Center. This bricks and mortar structure if built, with a ribbon cutting of March 5, 2020, would have been sitting empty for these past 8 plus months and would sit empty for years to come as we have virtualized our efforts in this area. Beyond the points raised above, I do have concerns about some items in the outline. Such a plan requires subject matter expert advice, along with citizen input beyond the JFAC members. In addition, the outline focuses on areas that I see as squarely within my purview as Manager. Operations, maintenance, service levels, and tradeoffs are issues that are not appropriate for a planning document. I am particularly concerned regarding level of service discussions that are not informed by staff, broader public input by the relevant stakeholders, and could in fact conflict with other Board-adopted or operation plans (e.g., the Public Spaces Master Plan, elements of the MTP, and water, sewer and stormwater plans.) For example, conversations on partnerships is always of interest, yet must be informed by legal, operational and financial advice. Happy to discuss further