



Fiscal Year 2015 Budget Message to the Residents of Arlington County

Like past budgets, this year's provided its own set of unique challenges. We needed to balance the needs of our Schools, employees, social safety net programs, continuing service operations, and Arlington County taxpayers. The County Board spent countless hours in work sessions, public hearings, and informal conversations. We posed a lot of questions to the Manager and staff and received significant feedback from the community, which was incorporated into the final budget decisions of the County Board. Overall, the FY 2015 budget continues to provide high quality service by maintaining core County services and infrastructure, while limiting the growth of the County budget and the burden to taxpayers who have seen real estate values rise.

Similar to past years, the demands for funding exceeded revenue available and required the Board to make some difficult decisions. We balanced funding decisions against responsible taxation. The FY 2015 Adopted Budget preserves key services, infrastructure maintenance, and our social safety net; it funds no new initiatives, and adds significant funding for Schools, while giving some tax relief to homeowners.

The Adopted Budget for FY 2015 totals \$1.15 billion for the General Fund and includes a one-cent real estate tax rate decrease. Arlington's tax rate is the lowest in the region, while still maintaining high quality services, low crime and one of the finest public school systems in the US.

Arlington's budget choices were again validated in May 2014 with the reaffirmation of our Triple-AAA bond rating, a rating enjoyed by just a handful of communities across the nation. Our County remains financially sound, and we continue to make strategic investments in schools, parks, community centers, and other important infrastructure.

Highlights of the FY 2015 Adopted Budget include:

Schools Funding Increased – The County Board increased the funding to Schools by 6 percent, providing a total of \$440.6 million to Schools, adding \$19.6 million in base funding and an additional \$8.4 million for one-time expenses, including school construction. Arlington's support for our students now exceeds \$19,000 per pupil – more than any other school district in the region.

Social Safety Net – Arlington continues its commitment to those most vulnerable in our community. We were able to continue funding many programs that were funded in FY 2014 through a combination of one-time and ongoing funding. The County Board increased funding for the Arlington Free Clinic and Offender Aide and Restoration, while adding one-time funding for a local unified hotline response system for domestic and sexual violence, Arlington Neighborhood Villages, BU-GATA, and Food for Others.

Affordable Housing – The County Board added additional one-time funds (\$500,000) to the Affordable Housing Investment Fund (AHIF). In FY 2015, total AHIF funding equals \$13.0 million, building on the commitments made in FY 2013 and 2014. The County continues to make progress on the long-range housing study, which is assessing the gaps in existing housing programs, determining long-term goals and funding priorities, and identifying funding strategies and new tools that can help us achieve our goals.

Commitment to the Environment – The Board continues its commitment to the environment by adding funds for tree planting and increasing staffing for Stormwater programs. These additional

positions are paid for with dedicated revenues available in the Stormwater Fund and are critical to meet Arlington's commitment to the Chesapeake Bay and local watershed health.

Continuing Our Commitment to Employees – We recognize the importance and value of our workforce in the operation and delivery of a wide range of County services to our community. The County Board was able to maintain an anticipated employee pay increase to keep employee pay competitive in the region, and provide a 1 percent market pay adjustment to those employees at the top of their pay grade -- who haven't seen a pay increase in two years. The four-year competitiveness review of salaries that began in FY 2012 will continue in FY 2015.

This year's Adopted Budget is the result of a collaborative partnership among the County Board, residents, advisory groups, and staff. I want to thank all involved for their efforts. I believe the FY 2015 Adopted Budget balances the needs of multiple interests and stakeholders to provide a fair and responsible budget. This budget reflects our community values, meets our rigorous budgetary practices, while keeping us on the path for continued success and sustainable growth to the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jay Fisetle". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "J".

Jay Fisetle
Chair, Arlington County Board