

Statement by Mary Hynes on the call for a streetcar referendum

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I strongly agree with the Chair that we can address the community's concerns about streetcar without a referendum.

In my more than 18 years of public service in Arlington, I have been a passionate advocate for balanced capital investment programs. From the Arlington public schools in the 90s to the County in the '00s to WMATA (Washington Metropliation Area Transit Authority) in the 2010s, I have consistently pushed and voted for CIPs (Capital Investment Program) that focused on three key sustainability principles

- taking care of the community's assets
- investing in new facilities designed to move our community forward
- being fiscally responsible.

From my perspective, this call for a referendum reflects genuine concern by some about the County's finances, and a worry that, by building the streetcar, we are making commitments that will ultimately prove unaffordable for taxpayers or will hamper achieving other key community priorities like providing additional seats to address Arlington Public School (APS) crowding. I worry too about our financial future.

That's why I feel so strongly that the generational strategic investment in a streetcar is needed to grow our total economy, providing new revenue to help meet the whole County's funding needs. The recent streetcar return on investment study demonstrated that building the streetcar will grow our economy far faster and produce three times the revenue that any bus-only solution would produce - providing new funding for schools and the myriad of county services we all rely on. At the same time, this investment can't be at any cost and I will only support this project if the funding plan excludes home-owner financed general obligation bonds.

Our record as a Board clearly shows that we take fiscal concerns seriously as we strive to achieve our vision. For example, we have been closely working with APS on funding for additional seats and we learned this morning that the School Board has adopted a CIP and a 2014 bond request that meets their needs and can be successfully integrated into our 10-year CIP. We've also had several instances where unacceptable cost increases in long-planned capital projects have required action. As the Board has worked to address these situations, my goal has always been to seek ways to fulfill the community's vision while carefully managing costs.

So, when construction bids for the Long Bridge Aquatic, Health and Fitness Center came in higher than expected, the Board directed the Manager to find

ways to reduce the cost while still adhering to the community's vision for the park. When analysis found that the gap was simply too big to close, we put the project on hold. Now, we are seeking ways to further leverage private sector investments to move the project forward. I have one bright line guiding my decision-making - I will not ask Arlington taxpayers for more money to build the facility.

When the Columbia Pike transit station prototype cost too much, the Board directed the Manager to put that project on hold and look for a more cost effective way to build this important piece of public infrastructure. She found a way to substantially reduce the cost of the stations, bringing the total down by 40 percent. This reduction made the cost of each station comparable to those for other BRT (Bus Rapid Transit), light rail and streetcar stations across the country and maintained federal, state and local dedicated transportation funding for 94% of the project costs.

But we did not compromise our vision – the community's vision -- for the Pike. Each station will still accommodate hundreds of riders daily on what is the busiest bus corridor in Virginia, and serve our vision of transforming the Pike into a more transit-oriented, pedestrian-friendly "Main Street."

The same steps must and will be taken with the streetcar program. I strongly advocated that we bring an experienced program management consultant with significant streetcar construction experience on board. In the coming months, one of Parsons Transportation Group's first tasks will be to provide an objective review of the program and assess options for cost reduction, including exploring potential public-private partnerships. As we continue to refine our streetcar project, this important review will provide new information and a roadmap for future key decisions.

This management approach – a bold community vision matched with fiscal responsibility - is one that I take pride in. It doesn't mean there aren't missteps along the way, but in Arlington we don't let ourselves get distracted from our overall goals, and when mistakes are made, we fix them. That is why this County has been able to maintain its Triple-AAA bond rating for so many years. We are one of only 39 counties in the United States to hold this distinction. The rating agencies noted our careful financial management, conservative debt policies and closely monitored expenditure controls as key elements of our coveted rating.

So to those who now want to put the streetcar up for a referendum vote, "in order for the peoples' voices to be heard", I say the voices raising questions about fiscal restraint and sustainability, strategic investment and community process have been heard. Those concerns are helping guide our balanced next steps on

the streetcar - project refinement and funding that excludes homeowner funded general obligation bonds. Fundamentally, this is all about expanding our tax base as a way to create a vibrant, diverse future for our entire County.