

Councilman Dick Ladd

Anne Arundel County Council

Fifth District

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Four years ago I ran for public office out of concern for the fiscal condition of the County. The economy was weak; County revenues were down; and we were facing structural deficits.

Today, County revenues are back to 2008 levels in constant dollar terms. Our employee head count is lower than in 2008. Salaries today have kept up with cost-of-living increases. The operating budget structural deficit has been largely closed and the budget is now providing funding for the County's \$1.2B unfunded retiree health insurance benefits.

The "nominal" \$2B-plus infrastructure backlog (half of which is school construction) remains. It excludes the fee financed, "life cycle" maintenance costs of the County's water system, sewer system and the storm water management process. (These four categories plus County roads and bridges constitute the major pillars of our Adequate Public Facilities sustainment construct.) As the County can "afford" to start about \$123 million in capital projects each year, the waiting list is over 16 years long.

The great news is that District 5 and its schools will be in superb condition once the on-going projects at Severna Park High School, Jones Elementary and Benfield Elementary Schools are completed along with a new Arnold Elementary School later in the decade. We will have a new police station; a more capable and renovated Mill Creek pumping station combined with significant storm water management projects for the Magothy River.

The infrastructure problems facing Anne Arundel County and District 5 are and will continue to be roads. The County Adequate Public Facilities (APF) policy for roads seems to be based on an adequate return of gas tax revenue from the State. The loss of that \$30M per year plus the slowdown in State Highway programs, which fund our numbered highways on which we do 80% of our travel is going to confound local travel.

I note and applaud the State's recent increase in commuter bus service to the Severna Park and Broadneck areas. Good stuff, but the most frustrating part of our commute may well be just getting to the schools, shopping, or the Park and Ride via County roads. The "first and last mile" of our travel – roughly 20% of our miles driven – is traveled on the 80% of the road network owned and operated by the County. Today the County capital investment program provides \$5M/year for County road resurfacing and \$11M/year for road reconstruction. This is about a third of what is needed.

The County must address the road funding/APF situation jointly within its planning and zoning policy which, for a mature area like District 5, seems to favor residential density increases. (The Council rejected Bill 81-13 which would have made it easier to approve such density increases without community involvement.) These density increases must tastefully incorporate senior and/or retirement living.

The clear challenge is how to fund necessary quality of life capital projects: roads, sidewalks, parks and libraries. The County debt servicing capability is limited to 10% of operating revenue. Without a carefully focused tax increase, the choice is to find an additional dedicated source of funding (public-private partnerships, a fee, State or Federal grants), or delay or displace other programs in the County Capital Investment Program (CIP).

With respect to the coming election, the Council considered and rejected three Charter amendments proposed for voter approval: authority for mail-in election of certain off-cycle County Councilman replacements; making

the County Attorney an elected official; and requiring County Council confirmation of an appointed County Attorney.

In closing, my last article for the Voice, it has been a great pleasure and an honor to represent and work with the many vibrant and dynamic Severna Park and Broadneck communities. Public service is indeed rich in its psychic rewards and I have been well rewarded. Thank you.