

Stafford County Board of Supervisors Candidate Forum Questions

Thursday, August 23, 2007 7:00 P.M. at Brooke Point High School

Hosted by: *Fredericksburg Area Association of Realtors, Fredericksburg Area Builders Association and the Fredericksburg Regional Chamber of Commerce*

1. Should proffers be the primary source for financing of new infrastructure?

There are so many ways this question could be answered- addressing how growth impacts our schools, roads, or budget- and how proffers fit into the equation.

My concern with this question is the word "primary". If you mean – the first- then yes- because of the difficulties with how the state and federal government deal with transportation- proffers are the way to first get our needs addressed.

If one means "primary" as THE source of funding then we know that not to be the case. One only has to look at this week's BOS meeting to see the discussion on work for Falmouth and 17 to see the roles the fed's and state play.

Proffers have a role to play in the process, as do other funding mechanisms such as PPP's, Garvee Bonds, State revolving funds, Tax exempt municipal lease financing

Some may be allowed in VA, others in the future. But there is no one solution.

2. Would you endorse the use of TIFs? CDAs? Special tax districts?

We certainly need to think outside the box in our attempts to bring more businesses and offices to the county. For years I have been stressing the need to diversify our tax base.

As for TIF's and CDA's, often these are used in enterprise zones or blighted areas, and I am not sure if any area in Stafford qualifies as that. There are areas we desire to renovate and these might qualify.

One concern I have is that we have seen examples where large companies come into a community, get special treatment taxes waived that our local businesses can not, and then the large company leaves for a better deal. At times these companies bring in workers from Northern Virginia or out of state. In our efforts to broaden our tax base we need to make sure that our local businesses are not forgotten.

3. Currently, BPOL tax is assessed on gross business receipts without regard to whether a company makes a profit. Does this tax hurt the business environment of your jurisdiction?

To some the BPOL is a panacea that will cure our budget woes. To do so is not to understand economics or the basic problem in our budget.

Those in favor of a BPOL state they want “business to pay their fair share”, they want the businesses to eat the cost of the BPOL from their profits. For this to happen the tax can not be too large, but that will not raise the money these people want to raise. If the tax is large then it will be passed onto the consumer- mainly the property owners of Stafford. One need only to look at our neighbors where when you purchase a car there is a line item for the BPOL to see why this does not work.

The larger problem is that an additional tax does not address the fundamental problem- that we continually raise property taxes to fund the county’s programs.

Rather than merely adding new taxes, we should examine how we finance our county, see what other localities in the commonwealth, and maybe other states are doing that allows them not to continually hit the same tax payers.

4. Do you support set asides for affordable and workforce housing in new developments?

There are several questions about workforce and affordable housing and I believe I addressed those issues in the questions answered during the debate.

The greater, overarching question as we head into the future is how does the county plan for the development that will arrive- if not during the lifespan of the Comp’ Plan being developed, than afterwards. Many want to set arbitrary numbers and only plan for those, ignoring the realities of the situation. This is not acting in the best interests of our citizens, long time, current or future. To plan for short term numbers and not the long term guarantees more traffic situations like 610 and 17. The county deserves better.

5. Do you support the reduction or elimination of proffers for affordable/workforce housing?

It is likely that I am the candidate with the lowest salary, and who works with those who can not afford to live in our county. When we talk about affordable housing we are talking not only teachers, police and the like, but the elderly, those on fixed incomes, disabled and single income families. Arch DiPeppe did an excellent job presenting the issue before the Steering Committee. It is clear that 3, 10, 20 and 30 acre lots are NOT affordable housing.

We need to examine any plan to see if it is in the county’s best interest in the long term.

6. Do you support density bonuses for affordable/workforce housing?

Again- any attempts at housing must be examined for its long term impact on the county.

Also, we need to prepare this county for the future. It has long been the policy to have Route 1 be where we want growth to be concentrated. Yet there has not been any significant discussion about how to make this road, which is the overflow for 95, capable to handle all the traffic.

This is a major reason why I am running- to start this county in seriously planning for the future, protecting the rural areas we cherish while planning for what will come.

7. If a proposed mixed use development contains 10% workforce housing & commercial development, is that acceptable?

Basically this is asking about the newly passed TND ordinance, and one element of that was that each proposal would be evaluated on its own merit. The Planning Commission is set to re-examine the density and height provisions.

What is important to discuss is the way that those who were against this ordinance attacked, maligned and assaulted those who they disagreed with. Members of the county staff had their professionalism questioned by claims that were never substantiated. People who have given years of service to this county, such as Arch DiPeppe and Steve Pitzel, had their characters attacked.

But this seems to be the trend- we have seen it in past elections, the TND debate, on local cable programs, the discussion about this forum, op ed pieces- not discussions on the merits or nuances of issues, but personal attacks and innuendos.

I hope that the missing candidates will turn away from the "politics of personal destruction" and debate the real issues. But given their lack of presence tonight- it would appear they will not.

8. Would you support down-zoning outside of urban settlement areas (USA)?

As a member of the Comp Plan Steering Committee I have been vigorously fighting against the attempts to down- zone by a few members of that group. Two minutes would not be enough time to detail all the evidence of the failures of down- zoning in our county and around the nation. A few details need to be explained-

Over the course of the Steering Committee's work there was a strong effort to down- zone all property in the Ag areas to 20 and/or 30 acre lots. When others and I made attempts to inform the landowners and public of this, some of those advocating it thwarted them. It is VITAL that in any attempts to impact these areas the people must be included in the discussion. These are the people who did not have their land developed after the last down- zoning. They are due the respect and consideration of being part of the process from the start, not tagged on at the end.

9. Would you compensate property owners for any down-zoning?

Interestingly as an attempt to find common ground with those who believed in down- zoning I asked the staff helping with the Comp Plan to explore this idea, to find examples in ours and other states. The Comp Plan was moved from the Steering Committee to the Planning Commission before the research could be conducted. It is an idea that warrants exploration to see if it has merit.

10. Would you support a regional comprehensive plan?

Having served on a Comp Plan committee for over a year I believe that such a forum has value. The issues that confront us also face our neighbors. We could fix the Falmouth Bridge on our side of the river- the money fairy allows us to do whatever we want- but if once the traffic hits the other side the road can not handle the volume- then the issue has not been fixed.

Unfortunately one of our neighbors has sent mixed signals about regionalism. Sometimes they are in favor, others..well not.

We should continue to try to work regionally to deal with the issues that face all of us.

11. Would you increase the urban service area if the criterion is for build out at 80%? 70%? 60%?

Rather than tie evaluation and re-examination of the USA to percentages I favor a period revue of the Comp Plan, one that occurs on schedule. Creating and more importantly sticking to such a schedule would ensure that collection of data is on going and does not stall the actual work on the plan. Four years ago I called for updating our plan. It took new members on the board to get the ball moving. The Steering Committee was hampered by a lack of available data, particularly on transportation. Having a set procedure can head off this problem.

12. Would you support up-zoning in the urban settlement area (USA)?

In over a year's worth of meetings the idea of up- zoning was not officially brought up. With our current lull in the market, this may not be practical. It certainly could be examined to see if it has merit.

13. Would you support the use of eminent domain in the case of private property taken for public use (such as schools, roads, utilities, etc.)?

The 5th Amendment of the US Constitution spells out that issue of eminent domain when it says, "... nor shall private property be taken for public use without just compensation." To some this re-enforces the government's right to take people's property. To others, including the Founding Fathers it was to protect the people from having their property taken by the federal government without compensation.

Eminent Domain is one of inherent powers of governments. It has traditionally been used for items that will benefit all of a county, such as for schools, hospitals or roads. Since the right to property is so important, Eminent Domain should be used judiciously. Each case should be weighed on its own merits.

14. Would you support the use of eminent domain to transfer private property to another private property holder (such as Kelo vs. City of New London, Connecticut)?

Kelo is a textbook example of why people disagree with judicial activism. In general, the use of Eminent Domain is one that touches people's core values. People tend on being against it, but

can understand its need. When Eminent Domain is used, not for infrastructure for the community- but for projects where others will reap the reward- it causes people great angst.

Most states have or are in the process of refining/defining/narrowing Kelo.

It is likely that it will not remain an issue for long.

15. Would you support the use of eminent domain for Crow's Nest?

It would be imprudent to speak specifically on this as it is likely to be in front of the board even after the first of January.

I will detail my active involvement in the efforts to preserve Crow's Nest. Five years ago I joined the Trust for Crows Nest, a private group that was working to raise funds, through donations and actions of the state and federal governments to purchase this important piece of land. I have had the pleasure of touring this pristine parcel. This group had people involved as diverse as Kandy Hilliard and Bill Howell. My efforts led to a major article in the Free Lance Star and publicity for our fundraiser. I remember well working during that fundraiser- carrying tables with Ms Hilliard. I was active with Save Crow's Nest at their start. I have written a class lesson for local government using Crow's Nest as the center theme. This lesson has been used in other schools in Stafford and shared with the Commonwealth's Department of Education. I have pressed for the citizens to have a say in the process, such as attempts to get it on the 2004 general election ballot.

I have worked for years to see this land preserved- for environmental, historical and economic reasons. If I am on the board- I will continue to do so.