

Board retreat

Written by Christina Dimeo, Correspondent
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Supervisors hash out ideas for 2016

Holed up in the Fluvanna Community Center on a sunny Saturday (Jan. 30), the Fluvanna County Board of Supervisors and 12 staff members hashed out ideas for the new year.

Credit cards

Pushing county offices to accept credit cards showed up toward the top of the list. Supervisors and County Administrator Steve Nichols want residents to be able to pay online when it comes to personal property taxes, dog tags, and parks and recreation activities fees. Although the program would come at a cost to the county, Nichols said he considered it “the cost of doing business” in modern times.

Pay off debt

Though supervisors had saved cash, they deliberately financed the new E911 system at a low interest rate so that they could use their cash in other ways. Now that the general fund has a \$9.4 million balance, the Board has “flexibility that you normally don’t have,” Nichols said. Supervisors considered using the funds to pay off smaller debts with higher interest rates, build county-owned towers for the E911 system, fund next year’s capital improvements plan, and pay cash for some of the Zion Crossroads water system.

“You really have to think hard this year about how you want to pay for the things you need, and make a strong decision with the best benefit over the long-term,” Nichols said.

Roundabouts

The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) is “hot to trot” on the roundabout planned for the intersection of Rt. 15 and Rt. 53, said Nichols. Since there is already some funding in place for that roundabout, the approval of additional funding could result in construction starting as early as this summer, said Finance Director Eric Dahl.

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The roundabout proposed for the intersection of Rt. 53 and Rt. 618 is VDOT's second priority in the district, said Bobby Popowicz, director of community development. "They're pushing hard to get both of these projects out the door for us," he said.

Treasurer

Supervisors decided they want to hear more often from Treasurer Linda Lenherr about how the county's investments are faring. State code requires a monthly report from the treasurer, Nichols noted. Supervisors considered asking for a monthly written report and a quarterly in-person presentation. They also decided to ask Lenherr to prepare a report on how other county treasurers keep their supervisors informed.

Buildings

Wayne Stephens, public works director, said that he will spend time creating a building overview that will show how much the county's old buildings cost in operations and maintenance. Renovating an old building may be a more cost-effective way to provide "safe and legal" working space in some cases, Stephens said, but replacing particularly decrepit buildings may end up being a better choice. "It's time to ask yourselves that question and think about socking money away," he said.

Taxes

Now that some large projects are on their way to Fluvanna, such as the Louisa County Water Authority pipeline and the E911 radio system, supervisors directed staff to re-examine what taxes the county has in place.

Staff will also work to firm up policies on how construction bonds are set, as well as "amplifying the specificity of when those bonds get returned," said Planning Director Jason Stewart. Nichols said he wants to avoid another situation such as when the county returned the bonds for the

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roads in the Taylor Ridge subdivision before they were completed and turned over to VDOT.

Nichols noted building permits were up \$15 million more than the previous year. Though some of the building permits could simply be replacements rather than new construction, he was hopeful that some of that revenue would eventually hit Fluvanna via real estate taxes.

County image

Supervisors mulled over how to demonstrate to a hypothetical person in a “20-second elevator conversation” that Fluvanna’s relatively high tax rate actually equates to a medium-sized real estate tax bill.

“The [tax rate] number does matter,” said Nichols, because while he said he can convince someone in a “rational conversation” that living in Fluvanna is a good value, in a short conversation he “can’t get some people over that hump.”

Supervisors discussed how to put out that message to residents, including potential new residents and realtors.

Broadband

Supervisors agreed to establish a broadband task force to assess the county, determine gaps and needs, develop alternatives and options, and identify potential sources of funding. Having access to the Internet at home is essentially mandatory in this day and age, said Nichols, especially for students.

Recognition

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Supervisors agreed to start a community impact awards program, which would use a Board resolution to recognize residents for specific positive actions or for lifetime achievement. “How can we not recognize our own community?” said Nichols.