

4-4-05

# Del Ray Citizens Association

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Established 1954

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**To:** Honorable Mayor and Members of City Council  
**From:** Justin M. Wilson, President  
**Date:** March 31, 2005  
**Subject:** Comments on the City Manager's Proposed FY 2006 Budget

On April 4<sup>th</sup>, you will be having a public hearing to receive input on the City Manager's proposed FY 2006 budget. The Executive Committee of the Del Ray Citizens Association met on Thursday March 24<sup>th</sup> and prepared the following for consideration as you make your deliberations on the budget.

In preparation for our meeting on the 24<sup>th</sup>, we asked for input from the community. While we did not receive many responses, the few we did receive, as you may anticipate, focused on concerns regarding the potential for increased real estate tax obligations for the residential property owners in our neighborhood.

Due to the market forces, assessments have continued to increase by breathtaking percentages in our neighborhood. We are cognizant of the costs of providing the high level of city services we are accustomed to in Alexandria. We are also aware of the pressures that have been placed on the budget due to the faltering contributions of the state and federal governments.

We are supportive of the efforts the Council has already made to lower the tax rate in response to these assessment increases. We will be supportive of currently proposed efforts to diversify the tax revenues the City receives by using underutilized or unutilized revenue streams that are currently available. We urge Council to ensure that in efforts to reduce the tax rate, critical services and investments in neighborhoods are not sacrificed. That said, we strongly support efforts by Council to critically review the budget for any spending that is unnecessary or inefficient.

We continue to be supportive of Council's programs to help cushion the impact of the assessment increases on low-income homeowners. We believe that the proposed expansion of these programs is a valuable way to assist those least capable of handling these increases. We also urge expansion of programs designed to assist City workers in living within the City.

At the public hearing prior to the City Manager's preparation of the budget back in October, we pushed funding of two initiatives in our neighborhood. Today, we reiterate our request for consideration of the following high-priority improvement projects:

- Budgeting for new, pedestrian-oriented elements along Mt. Vernon Avenue. As part of the FY 2006 budget, DRCA requests that the City allocate enough funds

to create two demonstration blocks for new lighting, new brick sidewalks, street trees and other streetscape improvements. This demonstration block would serve as a model for future development along the rest of the Avenue, and would be a fitting way to begin funding the goals of the recently adopted Mount Vernon Avenue Plan. Coupled with the completion of the utility “undergrounding,” these efforts will enhance the streetscape for residents and businesses alike. Throughout our neighborhood—having truly pedestrian-oriented lighting is a critical component of our efforts for pedestrian safety as well as business development.

- Budgeting for significant improvements to the triangle of City-owned open space at the corner of Mount Vernon and Commonwealth Avenues. In conjunction with the improvements to the adjacent area being undertaken as part of the Duncan Library expansion—it is a perfect time for the City to “piggyback” improvements to this important “gateway” open space for our community. New fencing, pedestrian crosswalks, a rebuild of the existing tennis court, improved signage and landscaping are all excellent examples of improvements to this area, which can result in a signature “gateway” to our community.

By no means are these two projects the only funding priorities for our community, but we urge consideration of including these two items as high-profile examples of the City’s continuous reinvestment in Del Ray.

During the last budget cycle, there were a number of significant and important proposals that were made by individual and collective members of the Council as part of the budget “Add/Drop” process. In some cases these proposals were made public after the Council held their public hearing to accept comment on the proposed budget. Accordingly, the citizenry was not afforded the opportunity to comment on the myriad of proposals made as part of that process. We would respectfully request that Council consider the addition of a public hearing after the Add/Drop requests from individual members of Council are submitted, but prior to the final adoption of the budget. This would allow input into this aspect of the budget process.

We look forward to working with you during the budgetary process. Please contact me at 703-299-1576 with any questions that you may have.