

18 March 2006

Mayor Euille and members of City Council,

Last Monday, the Del Ray Citizens Association held its fifth annual Meet-n-Greet where we welcomed the 230 new households that have made their home in our neighborhood over the past year and provided them an opportunity to learn about the multitude of services that are available to them.

Of the 33 departments listed on the city's website, over 13 plus the schools were present. Every Department I asked provided materials and personnel, and I expect I could have had more just for the asking. The event was a success and on behalf of the Del Ray Citizens Association and our neighborhood, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the city staff for helping to make it so.

I did notice that this was the first time that none of the council members or candidates attended this event. But I understand that when the Meet-n-Greet was beginning there were still 75 people signed up to speak at the budget hearing, so I guess all of you had a pretty good excuse.

Actually, I'm surprised that there were only 75 left to speak. Again using information available on the city's website, there are at least 149 civic and homeowner associations, and 62 Business, Professional, Service, or Special Interest Groups listed. The current roster of Boards, Commissions and Committees has 76 entries. I should list the non-profits and performing arts groups, all of the individual advocates and activists, and finally the users or consumers too, because all of these stakeholders have a keen interest in the status of the multitude of city services and programs, and the staff support required to provide them.

The primary reason we have all of these services and programs is because there is a need and because we, the stakeholders, demand them. And not only do we demand the services and programs, we want to be highly involved in most aspects of the decision process. Meetings, workshops, taskforces, committees – the participation in the decision process is amazing. As is the amount of staff time and city resources utilized. Perhaps the best way to summarize is that we the stakeholders expect and receive a high degree of personalized service in almost all aspects of city services, programs and government. And in general, personalized service costs more. Based on the predicted average increase in property taxes of about \$427 per household that personalized service is going to cost per household about \$35.58/month or \$8.21/week or \$1.17/day more.

Now one of the problems with reducing the budget is that hard decisions need to be made about what to cut, and while I was not at last Monday's meeting, I expect most testimony did not have any explicit budget saving recommendations.

I have a recommendation that draws on a typical comparison that is made about households having to live on a budget. When I make up my budget and have to save some money, I decide where I am going to make the sacrifices. I decide if I am going to turn my heat down, take shorter showers, or eat at home more. I do not determine the sacrifices that my neighbor has to make for his budget. And more importantly, my neighbor does not determine my sacrifices.

I make this point because it is the stakeholders that need to decide what portion of the personalized service they utilize that they are willing to sacrifice. If each stakeholder is not willing to provide this information, if each stakeholder is not willing to actively help the city save \$8.21 per household per week, then someone else will have to decide the sacrifices they make.

And if it comes down to cutting the budget, I recommend you cut all department services and programs uniformly across the board. This way all stakeholders are required to adapt and sacrifice some of the personalized service they receive.

David Fromm
2307 E Randolph Ave
703-549-3412