

The Freight Train Cometh

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The freight train that has been coming at us is our population explosion as it relates to our public schools.

Our Primary Solution to this problem is the planned new High School.

Our Follow-Up solution is called Phase II.

The combined cost is a sky rocketing tax burden.

But that's ok because the freight train is coming and we more fear that train wreck than we fear northern Virginia tax rates.

It now appears the freight train is slowing down. We are now at one half the growth rate we have recently been at.

No one is saying that the freight train is not coming but just that we now have a little more time to refine our plans.

SUGGESTION - Schedule implementation with milestones.

According to projections published by the School System in 2005, school census would hit 4000 in 2009, 4500 in 2012, and 5000 in 2016.

The Board of Supervisors approved the Domino Plan presented by the Board of Education based on these figures being realistic.

According to an analysis based on new housing trends, including new data since 2005 (the date of the projections), a school census may not be reached until sometime after 2020.

Furthermore, an analysis of housing costs as related to school census also yields a date of after 2020 for a school census of 4000.

The significance of a school census of 4000 is as follows: In 2009, the new high school was scheduled to be completed. In 2009, the school census will be 4000 students, assuming the projections made in 2005 come to fruition.

The true construction goal is thus not to have the new high

school completed in 2009 but rather to be completed when the school census reaches 4000.

Working with a three year construction to completion cycle, the new high school was scheduled to begin this year, 2006, so it could be completed in 2009 when the school census was projected to be 4000.

As an example, if the school census would not reach 4000 until 2013, we would not need to start construction until 2010.

This is significant because each year delay results in a saving of interest of approximately 1.5 million on 34 million at 4.5%. These funds would then be available for the actual education of students.

Some have said that inflation would raise the costs by an equivalent amount each year. This does not make sense because inflation effects the other side of the equation also. The tax base increases with inflation as do incomes. Thus the effect of inflation negates itself.

Furthermore, if we can delay the big project, perhaps we could deal with smaller projects sooner.

I therefore suggest that we establish an implementation schedule that is based on actual growth rates, actual population milestones, and actual school census milestones.

This "actual facts" schedule must be reviewed and updated semi annually so we know when we should actually "break ground" for each of the approved and/or already planned projects.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this one suggestion will not eliminate the need for a new high school nor will it eliminate the need for any other of the already planned projects. It is simply a suggestion for the scheduling of the various projects.

If we balance the new construction with actual growth we can minimize the tax burden on all of us. This is because the trend of recent growth is higher tax revenue for new homes than for existing homes.

When the freight train comes it will not crash. We will be ready.