

## **Statement by County Board Member J. Walter Tejada on the call for a streetcar referendum**

06/17/2014

After listening to the community and carefully evaluating all factors, I have concluded that I cannot support holding a referendum on the County's planned streetcar system. My reasons are slightly different than my colleagues.

At the beginning, I was not a strong supporter of this project. I was skeptical and shared the concerns of many in our community who feared the impact the streetcar might have on our diverse residents who now live in the Columbia Pike area. We were concerned that the growth spurred by this investment would mean many of the working class residents who call the Pike home today would not be able to do so in the future.

But my determination to always strive for a better Arlington motivated me to roll up my sleeves and work hard to find ways to make this project benefit our entire community. And we have taken some truly innovative steps to leverage the benefits of a modern streetcar system to maintain the Pike's affordability into the future.

First, our Neighborhoods Plan, adopted in 2013 when I was Board Chairman, calls for sustaining 6,200 units of affordable housing and allows up to 14,000 new residences on the Pike. In order to take advantage of these new opportunities, developers must include significant affordable housing, either through preservation or new construction. I believe this is the strongest commitment that any community has ever made, in this region and perhaps in the nation, to preserving housing along a corridor where a major transit system will be built.

Bringing a fixed-rail system, such as a modern streetcar, to the Pike will give developers and property owners a powerful incentive to choose to develop under the Neighborhoods Plan. The additional housing, including affordable housing that we will gain, will help ensure that the Pike will continue to be a place where folks of all incomes can live.

During my Chairmanship last year, I also helped create the Columbia Pike Tax Increment Financing tool, or TIF, which sets aside 25 percent of the additional tax revenue generated by new development and property value appreciation in the revitalization district for affordable housing along the Pike. The remaining 75 percent of this tax revenue growth will help fund future services across the County – including schools.

I too am committed to the streetcar, but not at all cost. I will support the building of the streetcar only if it does not require Arlington homeowners to take

on bond debt to pay for it. I will walk away from the project rather than violate that pledge.

A modern streetcar system is also crucial to the success of this plan. As the return on investment study shows, investment in the streetcar will generate up to \$735 million in new tax revenues for Arlington over a 30-year period - more than three times the amount generated by enhanced bus. This will directly result in more money for affordable housing. And yes, it will also mean more funds for other County services, including for our great schools.

But this project is more than just dollars and cents. The streetcar is about making it easier for workers and residents in Arlington to get to their jobs, on a comfortable, efficient transit system that connects their neighborhood to employment centers. It's about making it easier for residents to do their grocery shopping and run other errands on a system that connects to retail businesses all along the corridor.

Providing these options is hugely important to the more than 40% of transit riders on the Pike who are in the region's lowest income group, and who depend on public transit to make living in Arlington affordable. We already have given them a strong bus system, by creating Pike Ride and expanding ART (Arlington Rapid Transit) service, and they are looking to us to continue the investment and provide a system that will carry them into the future.

Those living on and near the Rosslyn-Ballston corridor already understand the value of high-quality, high-capacity rail. Extending Metrorail along Columbia Pike is neither practical nor affordable, but with a modern streetcar system we can create many of the same benefits for a fraction of the cost.

More than 15 years of community process and decisions and public participation - in the finest Arlington tradition - cannot be reduced into a single referendum question. We owe it to the thousands who have participated in the process, and to those who have planned their lives and personal and business investments around the streetcar system, and to our entire community and future generations of Arlingtonians, to move forward with this important project. There are better ways than a referendum to address concerns some have about this project, and I'm committed to working with the entire community to do that -- for all of Arlington.