



**The business climate in Virginia and Fairfax County** is essential to attract and retain business and workforce for economic growth. This success is reliant on a business climate that allows and encourages both existing and new businesses to grow.

Virginia has consistently ranked high in surveys for business success due to a vision that provides a climate for business growth. Crucial elements for business growth include right to work laws, investment in education, workforce training, stability in wage and compensation structures, low costs of doing business, transportation infrastructure and a quality of life that includes low crime rates.

We support a pro-growth and pro-jobs legislative agenda on all levels of government. The Board of Supervisors, the General Assembly, and our Federal representatives must work with businesses to retain, create, and attract jobs.

In partnership with our members, community stakeholders, and elected officials the Chamber will continue to champion business growth and community strength. The 2022 legislative agenda is a framework for policy that will build on current successes and point the way to the future.

## COVID-19

The Covid-19 pandemic has placed unprecedented strain on local businesses as they try to keep their doors open and serve the community.

### **BUSINESS IMMUNITY**

We strongly encourage the General Assembly to provide immunity from civil claims related to the transmission of or exposure to the COVID-19 virus. When businesses comply with the most recent federal, state and local laws, policies and procedures to reduce the risk of transmission of Covid-19 to individuals present on the premises then that business should be held harmless for employees or customers who contract the virus. Providing such immunity will give more certainty to businesses as they operate during this time.

### **BUSINESS FLEXIBILITY**

We strongly encourage the General Assembly and Fairfax County Board of Supervisors to make permanent temporary measures which provide businesses in the hospitality sector the flexibility to mitigate negative impacts caused by Covid-19.

## TRANSPORTATION

### **RICHMOND HIGHWAY**

Because Richmond Highway is the main transportation corridor for Eastern Fairfax County, the Chamber supports the Richmond Highway Improvement Project to widen this important regional transportation corridor, starting construction of BRT lanes as soon as feasible, the expansion of Metro rail lines down the corridor, and implementing “Place Making” concept

We encourage Fairfax County to implement SB 1385 Undergrounding of Utility Facilities recently passed by the General Assembly and begin a county-wide effort to underground utilities on major transit-oriented corridors. If undergrounding does not take place when Richmond Highway is widened each individual re-development proposal will be required to underground the utilities on their site as the Comprehensive Plan now requires. This scenario will leave Richmond Highway continually under construction for many years to come and may never achieve the undergrounding and will not achieve the desired revitalization.

### **FORT BELVOIR**

Mount Vernon Lee Chamber of Commerce supports transportation investments in Eastern Fairfax County that emphasize the importance of Fort Belvoir as the major employment center in Fairfax County. Fort Belvoir is an essential component of the national defense strategy and the largest employer in Fairfax County with an estimated annual economic impact of \$15 billion.

1. The transportation infrastructure around the Installation needs to reflect the economic impact of an employer larger than the Pentagon.
2. Transportation infrastructure should support the Fort Belvoir workforce in their important national security roles and new business growth related to the Installation.
3. The Chamber also supports legislation that would require undergrounding of utility cabling and communication lines in Virginia when there is new construction (including road widening) of major roadways within 10 miles of a major military site.
4. The Chamber supports working with Fort Belvoir to find ways to lessen the impact of the thousands of military single occupancy drivers on the road network in the Mount Vernon and Lee Districts.

### **METRO**

The Metro system is an essential component of job creation and economic growth. Metro leadership should be held accountable for the performance of the system. Funding for WMATA should be both sustainable and politically accountable with appropriate support from leadership in Richmond. Our elected officials at all levels of government should work together to:

- Plan for Yellow Line Metro extension to Beacon Hill and Hybla Valley.
- Plan for Blue Line Metro extension.

### **TELEGRAPH ROAD**

Improvements on Telegraph Road are an important part for the regional transportation infrastructure. With more development in south Fairfax County and Fort Belvoir, Telegraph Road needs crucial spot improvements to alleviate congestion and improve safety.

### **GEORGE WASHINGTON MEMORIAL PARKWAY**

The George Washington Memorial Parkway is a national treasure and we encourage implementing traffic calming measures recommended by the National Park Service that will help return the Parkway to the scenic route it was designed to be. Such measures should protect pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists while allowing all to safely enjoy the scenic nature of the roadway. These calming measures will help alleviate immediate concerns but further study should take place for the long term sustainability of the Parkway.

## **ECONOMIC GROWTH**

### **WORKERS COMPENSATION**

Virginia's workers' compensation program is one of the most efficient and affordable in the nation. Expansion of benefits and eligibility would affect the careful balance between an injured workers' need for compensation and conferring too high a burden on employers.

### **UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS**

We encourage a modernization of the Virginia Employment Commission so those eligible for benefits can receive them in a reasonable amount of time. The Commonwealth should continue to use available federal funds to avoid any increases to unemployment taxes paid by Virginia businesses.

### **ECONOMIC INCENTIVE PROGRAM**

Local property tax abatement enable by the General Assembly as an economic development tool has been adopted by Fairfax County. Some aspects of this general law need to be tweaked to meet the specific needs of Fairfax County and we appreciate efforts by members of the General Assembly to make these necessary changes.

### **FAIRFAX COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY**

We support the effort to expand the size of the Fairfax County Economic Development Authority board of directors from eight to nine to increase the diversity of industries represented on the board.

## **ENERGY**

Virginia must take advantage of all the energy resources available to it, including nuclear, coal, oil, natural gas, energy-from-waste and low-cost renewable resources and technologies, not only for our own energy needs, but as a key driver for businesses to grow and prosper in Virginia.

Reliable and affordable energy supply must keep pace with Northern Virginia's growing population and economy. Small businesses depend on competitively priced energy to operate. Virginia needs a balanced, sustainable energy policy that supports job growth and economic development.

We are very concerned about Virginia's participation in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), the regional Transportation and Climate Initiative (TCI) and the Virginia Clean Economy Act.

As fuel taxes remain the primary source of transportation funding, continued participation in the TCI will inevitably reduce revenue for highway construction and maintenance, mass transit and rail. It also brings massive fuel price increases that would touch every industry, product or service dependent on transportation, at an estimated cost of just under \$1 billion per year.

Using the Dynamic Integrated Climate-Economy (DICE) model used by those most worried about climate change, the lower emissions projected from the TCI will lower future temperatures by only 0.0001 degrees centigrade.

We recognize the need for Virginia to use all approaches to energy including incorporating renewable energy sources; however, the General Assembly and the State

Corporation Commission must ensure full transparency in the construction of wind turbines off the coast of Virginia Beach. There should be clarity around the additional costs to ratepayers in Northern Virginia. The concerns of local communities and businesses must be fully taken into account before construction begins along with appropriate controls to ensure this project is delivered on time and on budget.

## **TAXES & REGULATIONS**

### **TAX CONFORMITY**

The General Assembly should take swift action to provide for automatic tax conformity as many other states do. Failure to automatically conform with Federal tax laws is a backdoor tax increase to the citizens and businesses of Virginia.

Virginia needs to substantially increase the standard deduction it offers to all taxpayers, with the goal of matching the amount offered on their federal taxes. Virginia needs to index its tax code to inflation, again mirroring federal practice.

### **REGULATION RELIEF**

The bi-partisan legislation passed by the General Assembly to reduce business regulation by 25 percent is the right message to send to businesses. We encourage this effort and hope to see this implemented by state agencies.

Any proposal to impose additional mandates on small businesses related to labor and employment practices should be rejected. Proposals that would make it harder to utilize independent contractors, make small businesses the target of lawsuits, or create additional paperwork and increased compliance costs will damage business. The Chamber supports continued regulatory reform at all levels of government, and the elimination of burdensome and ineffective regulations that hinder appropriate business decision making and negatively impact competitiveness.

### **BPOL REFORM**

Year after year we ask for reform of the Business, Professional & Occupational License Tax (BPOL) and now is the time to act. Reforming this antiquated tax which punishes businesses by requiring gross receipts to be taxed regardless of profit would be a great relief to businesses. Now is the time to eliminate or modify this burdensome tax.

### **RIGHT TO WORK**

Preserving Virginia's proud tradition as a Right to Work state is a foundation of our economic success. Right to Work states have more than one and a half higher private sector job growth than states without these worker protections, according to data compiled by the National Institute for Labor Relations Research.

We are troubled by provisions in SB 1406 which erode Virginia's existing Right to Work law and encourage a removal of this provision when SB 1406 is considered for reenactment during the 2022 General Assembly Session.

## HEALTH CARE

Rising health care costs and fewer choices in the health care marketplace are reaching a crisis causing more businesses to stop offering health care benefits to their employees and pushing more people into Medicaid. We strongly support efforts to provide more choice in the individual and small group markets to provide affordable health insurance plans. We petition the General Assembly for an option for associations such as a chamber of commerce to provide affordable health plans for members.

### **FAMILY & MEDICAL PAID LEAVE**

Requiring paid family and medical leave would irreparably harm many businesses. Employees have the option through Federal laws including the recent CARES Act to receive both paid and unpaid leave to care for themselves or family members. Most businesses currently provide sick leave benefits and work with employees to keep them employed without needing more state mandates.

## EDUCATION

A strong educational system is the foundation for economic development and community success. Unfortunately, the pandemic has placed unprecedented challenges on educational systems including Fairfax County Public Schools. We encourage the General Assembly to fully and appropriately meet its Constitutional responsibility to adequately fund K-12 education and not shift this fiscal burden to localities.

### **LOCAL COMPOSITE INDEX**

The General Assembly should reform the state funding formula for schools which unfairly reduces the amount of money available for schools in Fairfax County. Fairfax County has more students who fall below the poverty line than many other jurisdictions and is in dire need of compensatory funding. Virginia should undertake an independent study of the impact of the “Composite Index of Local Ability to Pay” Formula on funding for education in counties and cities across the state, including those areas in northern Virginia like Fairfax County that experience the largest net losses of revenue.

### **MAINTAIN THE COST OF COMPETING ADJUSTMENT**

COCA is an additional factor that has historically been used in the state K-12 funding formula, recognizing the higher salaries required in certain high-cost areas of the Commonwealth to attract and retain highly qualified teachers and support staff. We encourage full COCA for K-12 support positions in Northern Virginia.

## **FAIRFAX COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Public schools in Eastern Fairfax County face challenges other school do not and recognition needs to be given to these needs with special programs to support students and schools.

FCPS and the School Board should work to ensure that the academic performance of local schools meet State accreditation standards. We strongly support differential funding for under-performing schools to support the needs of such schools and encourage efforts to bridge the “digital divide” and eliminate distinctions between students with and without Internet access through more public/private partnerships. Fairfax County Public Schools should provide a charter school option for students in local schools that continue to underperform to ensure educational success.

A full and independent audit of FCPS should be undertaken to ensure the transparency of operation in this public entity. Full transparency may identify cost savings and improvements in the delivery of education services.

## **HIGHER EDUCATION**

Fairfax County should encourage additional institutions for higher education to locate on the Richmond Highway corridor where there is a need for more educational and training opportunities. The Virginia Community College system is a critical asset for post-secondary education and the workforce for high school graduates and mid-career adults.

We support workforce credentialing programs, designed to increase the number of certifications in high-demand fields. Resources should be provided for Virginia Higher Education to include more enrollment slots for in-state students.



Eastern Fairfax County competes with other parts of Northern Virginia to attract businesses and jobs. With Richmond Highway and Springfield as a designated revitalization areas, we encourage Fairfax County to implement available policies and financial incentives that will positively impact our region such as economic growth incentive programs, tourism zones, and military manufacturing zones authorized by the Commonwealth.

## **ROBUST COMMERCIAL TAX BASE**

The best way for Fairfax County to increase its revenues is by increasing its commercial tax base. The County should actively improve the business environment by reducing unnecessary burdens on business (zoning, red tape, etc.), encouraging existing businesses to grow, and making Fairfax County an attractive location for new businesses.

A major step towards revitalization and expanding economic growth would be to simply adopt and embrace the flexibility called for in the current comprehensive plan and greatly reducing the time required from concept to the first shovel.

Fairfax County should have a plan for developing new businesses in and around the operations of Fort Belvoir that involves coordinating the efforts of all County agencies towards this objective.

#### **JOB CENTERS NEAR AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

In order to ensure that there are employment opportunities throughout Fairfax County, economic development should be encouraged throughout the County and not concentrated in a few specific locations. Jobs are needed where affordable housing is located. With the majority of affordable housing in Fairfax County located on the Richmond Highway corridor, there is an urgent need to intently focus on bringing jobs to the corridor also.

#### **BUSINESS PERSONAL PROPERTY TAX**

The Business Personal Property Tax imposed by Fairfax County is archaic and a burden on businesses. Simplification or elimination of this tax is encouraged.

#### **INTENSELY DEVELOPED AREAS**

The Mount Vernon Lee Districts of Fairfax County were intensely developed before many of the current regulations regarding rain water control, RPA and flood plains were enacted. Subsequently, we experience great hardship in costs and time trying to revitalize thru development and redevelopment because much of our current business and residential structures are located in RPAs and floodplains. Our districts urgently need Fairfax County to adopt and recognize the guidance Virginia Department of Conservation & Recreation that gives guidance for development, redevelopment and revitalization in Intensely Developed Areas (IDA).



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