

NEWS

# Worries over Human Services Funding

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budget and next year's. County Manager Ron Carlee announced last week that, due to plummeting real estate values, the County will be facing an approximately \$40 million gap in next year's budget unless it cuts spending, raises taxes or both.

Several months ago, Carlee said that real estate assessments for next year's budget would probably drop by two percent over this year's. Last week he revised that prediction downward. "I am getting concerned that may be understated as we're moving forward. "Decreases of five percent really could happen."

If real estate assessments do decrease by that much, the County's budget gap for next year will be closer to \$46 million, Carlee said, which would represent three percent of last year's \$1.18 billion spending plan.

**WITH THESE PROJECTIONS** In mind, the County Board gave Carlee its directions on how to devise a budget for the coming year. The board requested that Carlee and his budget team "add no new positions or programs supported by local tax revenues, unless bringing existing services in-house can be shown to save money." They also requested that there be no increase in the tax burden for the average Arlington real estate owner.

"The economic realities are fairly harsh and look like they will become more so," Board Member Chris Zimmerman (D) said. "I don't know that it has sunk in with everybody how difficult it really is."

While Arlington is experiencing tough budget times, other local jurisdictions are seeing much more dramatic shortfalls. Arlington's neighbor to the west, Fairfax County, is projected to have a \$500 million shortfall in its budget for next year.

Zimmerman said that federal and state aid could become necessary for local governments if conditions worsen. "State and local governments will have to cut services, raise taxes and balance their budgets," he

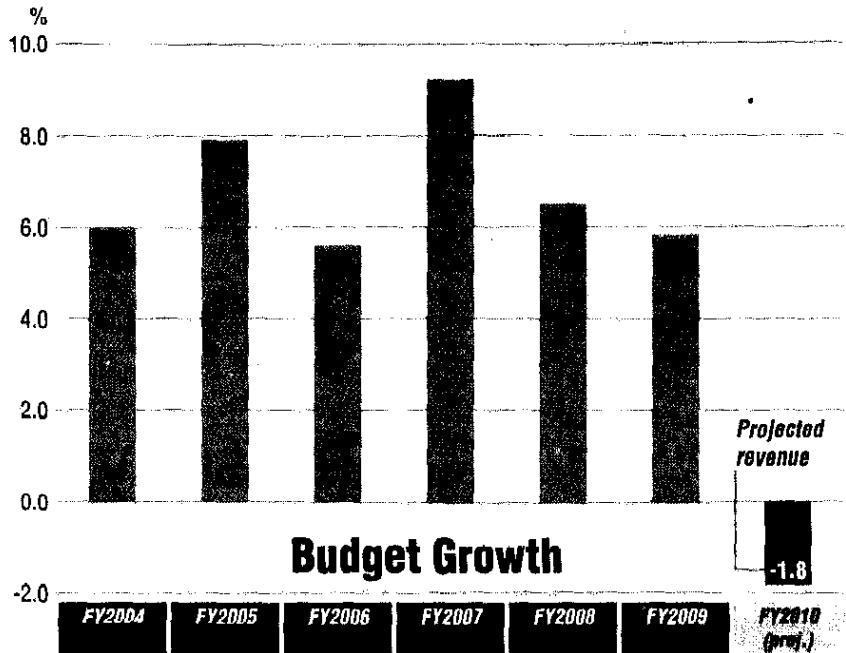


PHOTO COURTESY ARLINGTON COUNTY

**Declining revenue in Arlington County's upcoming budget for fiscal year 2010 could have a major impact on human services.**

said. "That's exactly the wrong thing for governments to be doing right now."

**HOWEVER**, because the board will not rely solely on tax increases to make up the spending shortfall, cuts to County services will be necessary. It's these cuts that have those who work in Arlington's human services community nervous.

"[They] will directly affect the health and welfare of the County's most vulnerable," local activist Erica Wood said.

Earlier this month, several local non-profits that deal with aging, homelessness and social justice sent the County Board letters urging the maintaining of current funding levels for human services programs. "Funding is never adequate under the best of circumstances," said Carol Skelly of the Arlington Community Services Board. "There's not going to be any excess in our budgets. ... That means that budget cuts are almost guaranteed to affect our clients directly."

Susan Philp, the chair of the Arlington

Commission on Aging, said that she is concerned that any budget cuts the board makes could affect the viability of the Mary Marshall Assisted Living Residence, a facility designed to serve seniors with mental or physical disabilities that is set to open next year.

County Board members said that they would take the human services' concerns into account as they move forward with the budget process. "We really care about having a community that ... provides the basic services: fire, police, a school system. That's why local government exists," Board Member Barbara Favola (D) said. "But we also care about our most vulnerable. We're going to take a very compassionate and balanced approach to our economic downturn and a need to provide a safety net. That's just the right thing to do and I don't think we're going to back down."

1/2 papers

11/27/08  
 To: Jim Gottstein  
 Psychrights  
 From: Marjorie  
 Salwin, wa  
 Fax # (907) 274-  
 9493  
 for Psychrights.  
 Subject: Arlington County,  
 VA, cuts "human  
 services" budget. ~~less~~ fewer people  
 to be locked up?

# Fighting for Piece of Smaller Pie

## Human services groups urge county to keep safety net intact.

By DAVID SCHULTZ  
THE CONNECTION

The irony was not lost on Linda Dunphy, the executive director of Doorways for Women and Families. Dunphy's group, which has been around since 1978 and is based out of Ar-

lington, provides services for the victims of homelessness and domestic violence.

As the economy has free-fallen in recent months, there has been a sharp increase in the demand for Doorways' services, which include supportive housing and a shelter for homeless families. However, at the same time, donations from the three major sources of Doorways' revenue — governments, foundations and individuals — are down.

"It's like a triple whammy for non-profits," Dunphy said. "Not only are we facing declining revenues, we're facing increasing need for our services."

Last week, Dunphy, along with the heads of other local human services organizations, went before the Arlington County Board to implore the board members not to cut the human services budget. "More families will be facing hardship in the next year or two and will require more services that will put a burden on County agencies," Housing Commission chair Kathleen McSweeney said.

**THAT COULD BE** a difficult argument to make now that the County is facing nearly unprecedented shortfalls in both this year's

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