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Dear Colleagues:

County Attorney Angela Horan has reminded each of us in a recent email about the annual review of the Rules of Procedure for the Board of County Supervisors, and this letter responds to her solicitation of any recommendations for changes to those rules.

Prince William County government is committed to upholding the highest standards of integrity and transparency in government. After reviewing all of our Rules of Procedure, I personally believe there are a number of improvements that can be made that will affirm our fidelity to that commitment.

To that end, I have listed six specific proposals for consideration by the Board for reforms to the Rules of Procedure to better serve the citizens we represent and bring a higher level of integrity and transparency both to the conduct of business by the Board and in our decisions on the expenditure of taxpayer funds.

1. Change Board Business Meetings (voting on resolutions) from 2 PM on Board Meeting Days to 7:30 PM. (Amending Section A: Meetings, subsection (a))

One of the most difficult problems confronted by citizens in Prince William County in accessing Board meetings is that they are held during the day. More than two-thirds of workers who live in Prince William County face long commutes to their jobs outside of the County. That fact makes it extremely difficult for those citizens to arrange their schedules to attend meetings held by the Board of County Supervisors under the current scheduling regimen, even when they have issues of significant interest before the Board.

By changing the time of the primary business meeting on Board meeting days where votes are taken from the current 2:00 PM afternoon schedule to 7:30 PM, we will dramatically expand the opportunity for citizens to participate in those meetings.

The afternoon meetings can be reserved for the Board to receive staff reports, review administrative matters, and conduct appropriate oversight activities that typically do not require votes to be taken. A more accessible government is obviously a more transparent government, and this change will significantly enhance the ability of many more citizens to have input on those matters that directly impact the quality of life for every family here in Prince William County.

2. Expanding the Current Restriction on Citizens' Time from 30 Minutes to 45 Minutes. (Amending Section F: Order of Business, Section 4)

The change in meeting times will likely result in an increase in the number of citizens who attend Board meetings, particularly on controversial issues. On some days, the increased participation may stretch the current restriction of 30 minutes for Citizens' Time. By expanding the allocation for Citizens' Time from 30 to 45 minutes, the Board acknowledges its interest in the views of the citizens of Prince William County on issues of importance to them.

3. Enhancing Transparency Through Better Agenda Distribution Procedures. (Amending Section F: Order of Business, Section 2)

The Virginia Code requires that all agendas and supporting materials be made available for public inspection at the same time that these documents are provided to the Board of County Supervisors.

It is my observation that we often fail to meet this complete obligation. On several occasions in the past, the meeting agenda has been distributed to the Board well in advance of its availability to the public. In addition, the agenda is often incomplete in terms of providing the supporting materials associated with specific agenda matters. It has become a far too common practice to have important supporting materials withheld until just before, or even during, a Board meeting. While I understand that there may be legitimate reasons on some infrequent occasions for a delay in the production of some materials prior to the Board meeting itself, I would think that those occasions should be the rare exception.

Accordingly, my proposal would restrict the Board from taking any vote on any agenda item where the supporting materials provided to the Board were not available at the time of publication of the agenda. My proposal includes two specific provisions that I believe will substantially enhance the access of citizens to these materials and their ability to provide comments and input on issues of interest to them.

First, I propose that we allow individual citizens to sign up for a subscription service for the Board agendas. By subscribing, they would automatically receive an email notice in their inboxes simultaneously with the publication of the Board agenda, including links to all supporting materials that are provided to the Board.

Second, I propose that we create a section on the County website that would allow for individual citizens to comment on agenda matters. This comment section on the website would open at the time of the publication of the agenda for the Board meeting, and it would close no sooner than two hours prior to the start of the Board meeting for which the agenda was published. All submitted comments would then be copied by County staff and delivered to the Board members at the start of the meeting so that these comments can be considered in the same manner as those comments offered by citizens during Citizens' Time.

4. Amending the Procedures for Submitting of Proposed Resolutions to Assure Optimum Citizen Review and Input. (Amending Section C: Quorum and Action, Subsection 3(b))

Recently, we have become complacent in the deliberations on various motions without giving proper recognition for the need for full public disclosure and allowing adequate time for public input.

Accordingly, I have proposed some specific amendments to our Rules of Procedure that will strengthen the procedures for the submission of resolutions. Specifically, my proposal requires that all resolutions must be submitted in writing, along with any supporting materials that an individual Supervisor intends to be considered by the Board, to the Clerk with sufficient advance time to be included in the published agenda packet for the meeting in which the action is proposed for consideration. If a Supervisor fails to provide either the written resolution and/or supporting materials for it prior to the publication of the agenda, the only manner in which the Board could then consider that resolution would be upon the approval by a two-thirds majority vote of the Board to waive this rule.

Additionally, I would propose the Clerk would have the responsibility for the delivery of a copy of any proposed resolution to all members of the Board, the County Executive, and the County Attorney before the resolution is proposed for adoption. A copy of the resolution pending before the Board must be shown on the overhead projector to allow for the public to view the same material as the Board while that matter is under consideration by the Board.

5. Amending the Procedures for Submission of Written Resolutions and Supporting Materials Following a Notice of Intent by a Supervisor. (Amending Section C: Quorum and Actions, Subsection 5(b))

Under our current rules, a Supervisor may announce his or her intent to seek Board action at a future Board meeting during Supervisors' time and then that issue would appear on the agenda in Supervisors' time at the next meeting of the Board. However, there is no requirement for the Supervisor who has announced such intent to provide a written resolution or supporting material in the published agenda for that meeting.

More often than not, the general statement of intent of a Supervisor fails to encompass the scope of the proposal that is contemplated, and the Board and the public are left with no clear idea about how the specific language may or may not affect the existing County policy until the disclosure is made by the Supervisors.

My proposed amendment to this section requires a Supervisor to provide to the Clerk the written resolution, along with appropriate written materials, in a timely fashion for the inclusion in the published agenda for the meeting where the action is scheduled for consideration during Supervisors' time. This amendment would restrict Board action from being taken on matter where the written resolution is not submitted in a timely fashion to be published in the agenda.

6. Providing for a Temporary Waiver of the Rules of Procedure for Emergencies.
(Adding a new Subsection 3 to Section I: Miscellaneous, and then renumber the following Subsections)

In the course of conducting business in Prince William County, there may be certain occasions where circumstances require immediate action that would be otherwise be prohibited by the Rules of Procedure as described herein. In those instances, this new rule would allow for a temporary waiver of the Rules of Procedure to account for those emergency situations by allowing for a waiver of the rule by approval of two-thirds (2/3) of the members of the Board present at a meeting at which a quorum has been established.

I am advancing these proposals for discussion by the Board of County Supervisors over the next several meetings in order to provide citizens with the opportunity to comment and participate in the discussion on their merits.

It is my firm belief that there can be much more done to improve the transparency of our government, and these steps will help us build that trust with the citizens of Prince William County.

Respectfully submitted,



Pete Candland