County of Fairfax, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

March 11, 2025

TO: Jeffrey C. McKay, Chairman and Members
Fairfax County Board of Supervisors

FROM: Sean Rastatter, Chairman
Information Technology Policy Advisory Committee (ITPAC)

SUBJECT: FY 2026 ITPAC Budget Letter to the Board of Supervisors

The Fairfax County Information Technology Policy Advisory Committee (ITPAC) is comprised of citizens with significant government and IT industry expertise representing key citizen organizations and County Board members. Through regular consultations with Department of Information Technology (DIT) senior leadership, ITPAC members provide advice for tackling IT challenges and seizing opportunities using the latest technologies and methods.

Fairfax County is consistently recognized as a top-performing innovative county with first-class IT management. Thus, expectations are elevated for DIT to deliver exceptional IT-based citizen services and staff support using innovative technology solutions with cost-effective IT investments.

ITPAC supports the County Executive's IT proposal in the FY 2026 Advertised Budget Plan. That would provide recurring, baseline funding to bring IT to its Optimal State, as well as ensure enhancements to IT infrastructure, operating support for completed IT projects, and funding to handle inflationary and IT product cost increases. This plan will result in a significant and timely infusion of funds to address important emerging requirements throughout the IT portfolio.

County IT Successes: Previous IT investments by the Board have yielded substantial positive results.

DIT Earns National IT Best Practice Awards: The County's IT Program is recognized as a national benchmark for excellence, being praised for its governance, investment, low-risk delivery model and cost-effective technology solutions aligned with the Board's goals. In 2024, Fairfax County secured second place in the Center for Digital Government's Digital Counties Survey for jurisdictions with populations exceeding 1 million. In the last 3 years, the County has placed first or second each year in the survey which honors the innovative use of emerging technologies, enhanced cybersecurity measures and strong digital equity initiatives. This reflects a citizen and business community with high expectations for the County's effective technology use. Sustaining this success requires ongoing, consistent IT investments.

Tax System and Planning Land Use System (PLUS) Improved Services: As noted at a recent Board IT Committee meeting, technology upgrades to tax systems greatly benefited County taxpayers. Average online personal property tax transaction times were reduced by 70% or more and in-person wait times were significantly reduced. Also, updates to the Planning and Land Use System for online permit applications led to a substantial increase in permit volume and shorter processing times.

ARPA Funds Found to Support Security Infrastructure and Replacement of Network Switches: DIT used Federal ARPA funds to expand and strengthen the security infrastructure. This investment supports the County's "Defense in Depth" strategy improving the detection and remediation of vulnerabilities.

Efficiency and Effectiveness Investment Recommendations: ITPAC endorses the following broad categories of investment to ensure the reliability, scalability and efficiency of County IT.

- *Cyber Security:* Cyber threats are on the rise. Local and state government entities have become prime targets. In today's highly connected world, maintaining business operation with continuous service delivery and public safety requires safeguarding critical infrastructure, managing third-party risks, overseeing AI and handling data governance. To defend the infrastructure from devastating effects of cyber attacks, it is crucial to invest in cybersecurity technologies, skilled personnel and expertise.

- *Digital Transformation and Innovation:* Ongoing investments in impactful initiatives like AI-driven workforce optimization, advanced chatbot integration, and improved customer portals demonstrate how emerging technologies are being harnessed to elevate local government services and create meaningful benefits for citizens.

- *Bringing IT to Its Optimal State:* It is critical that Fairfax stay in the forefront of modernizing infrastructure, pursuing innovation and being a leader in responsible use of new technologies such as AI, machine learning, and related technologies. Specific areas of investment will include:

    - *Infrastructure Requirements*:
      Providing investments in hardware, storage and expanded computing capabilities with a focus on data curation and cleanliness.

    - *Cloud Expansion:*
      Broadening the adoption of cloud services to manage heavy workloads involving AI, machine learning, and intrusion detection and prevention.

    - *Applications Modernization:*
      Including staff augmentation and/or implementation of best practices such as containerization, DevOps and robotic process automation.

    - *Phone System Replacement:*
      Targeted investments enhancing the County's telecommunications system architecture to support the current hybrid and mobile workforce.

    - *New Technology and Training:*
      Allocating funds to acquire new technology and providing continuous staff training to support it will ensure the County stays current with evolving technology supporting necessary capabilities.

ITPAC supports continuing investments in other critical areas of the IT enterprise, including:

Hybrid Operation: The Remote Access Project and other staff support initiatives are necessary to ensure the workforce's ability to operate securely, both remotely and onsite.

Enterprise Data Analytics: Enterprise data governance work, including analytics and citizen portals, must be expanded to leverage the immense value of County data for making informed, effective decisions.

Equitable Technology Access: Ensure equitable access to technology across the County.

Collaboration with Partners for Growth: Collaborate with local entities, such as FCPS or companies with a large local presence, to co-develop services like predictive analytics or "smart/connected communities."

Challenges to Achieving the Mission: ITPAC recommends acting to address these longstanding items.

Hiring Impediments with IT Staff Approaching Retirement: DIT struggles to hire and retain IT talent required from the DMV marketplace. Issues include non-competitive compensation, hiring responsiveness, limitation on home location and telework restrictions. The business impact will be felt soon as nearly 25% of DIT staff are in DROP or eligible to retire shortly. As part of its workforce planning initiatives, the County should consider both opportunities and challenges associated with recent federal workforce reductions in the IT arena at this unique point in time.

Protection of County Data: The cybersecurity threat landscape is continuously expanding due to advancements in artificial intelligence and cloud technology. Strengthening data governance practices, including data protection measures, is essential for maintaining uninterrupted operations and minimizing risk of lost data Prioritizing these efforts in budget planning is critical.

Growing Value of Data Analytics with Data Proliferating: As discussed in the Board IT Committee meeting, the expansion and increased use of data builds the need for advanced technology to collect, manage, preserve and analyze this data. In addition, ITPAC continues to advocate for a County Chief Data Officer to provide enterprise-wide leadership and direction.

Agencies' Business Process Transformations: As agencies strive for more efficiency through process transformation, their plans often have significant IT needs. For these to be effective, DIT must be engaged early as a partner to ensure the proposal is both cost effective and sustainable.

Agility and Time Required to Execute Contracts: The County would greatly benefit from increased contracting agility and faster contract awarding. Current processes can prolong the time required to implement. This can lead to higher costs and even prevent implementation entirely. This is an area where AI technology could be applied to some routine aspects of the process.

Additional FY 2026 Recommendation Highlights: ITPAC also supports the following initiatives.

- Use other available revenue sources or one-time balances to make more IT investments. This includes any funding designated for broadband coverage equity and other areas in DIT's purview.
- Continue the innovative multi-budget process investment strategy for major IT projects, allowing timely funding for multi-year projects such as the recently implemented PLUS system, the Human Services Integrative Roadmap and similar major projects.
- Provide additional funds needed to obtain and maintain required licenses for software and other core systems. Costs are increasing rapidly and will continue to grow in future years.

Conclusion: Similar to other large high-performing organizations, the County's reliance on technology continues to expand. Given the need to protect against constantly evolving cyber threats and the rapid advance in the use of information and technology to deliver services, the County must modernize with the latest technologies and applications to meet its goals. ITPAC appreciates and values the opportunity to assist the County in achieving best practices in technology governance and implementation strategies.

Cc:
Information Technology Policy Advisory Committee
Gregory Scott, Chief Technology Officer
Christina Jackson, Chief Financial Officer
Ellicia Seard-McCormick, Deputy County Executive