APE remarks at APS Public Meeting on Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)
June 11, 2024

Good evening, my name is Alison Babb and I am here to speak on behalf of Arlington Parents For Education. Tonight, we urge the School Board to align with the County on guiding principles for the Capital Improvement Plan. Namely, to acknowledge impacts of debt service on the operating budget and to properly plan for the future.

For the last few years, we have repeatedly advocated for stronger fiscal stewardship of taxpayer dollars, transparent and data-driven long term planning, an increase in revenue share from the County, and greater collaboration between the County and APS. In July, the County Board and School Board will meet to put APS on a sustainable fiscal path. But that collaboration must be rooted in shared guiding principles for a decade-long facilities plan.

Why? APS has a structural deficit which you all spoke about when adopting the budget last week. At the same time, the CIP that you also moved forward last week in a procedural vote will add nearly $93 million in debt service over the next decade relative to assumptions in the last CIP. That figure is based on debt service amounts included in public documents from APS based on the last CIP versus the proposed CIP.

We know that APS has many unmet needs - class sizes remain too large, APS is not remaining competitive with teacher pay, it is especially hard to recruit Special Education staff and the unmet needs of existing facilities. And too few resources have been devoted to learning loss despite historic one-time funds that are now gone. On the capital side of the budget, APS has deferred maintenance on many existing facilities with significant needs.

While these capital projects will largely be financed with bonds, the debt service shows up on the operating side of the budget and competes with other unmet needs in APS.
We want to say thank you for beginning to speak plainly about the challenges APS faces in the next decade. Now, let’s align with the County on their guiding CIP principles so both bodies can find better solutions.