



Richmond REALTORS® Fight for Good Schools – and Win! – March 2014

In Richmond, Virginia, REALTORS® have long understood the strong correlation between good schools and home values. Last year, they had to fight for it.

Facing an \$18 million budget shortfall, the Henrico County Board of Supervisors revealed that it would either have to raise property taxes; impose a 4 percent "meals tax" on food and beverages served in restaurants; or make drastic cuts to the school system budget -- which had already been pushed to the limit.

In April, a meals tax referendum was put on the November ballot, unanimously endorsed by the county Board of Supervisors. "We had never engaged in an issues campaign before," recalls Elizabeth Hancock Greenfield, the Director of Government Affairs & Member Services of the 4,000-member Richmond Association of REALTORS® (RAR,) "but it was clearly something we had to do. Of course, we weren't excited about the prospect of a real estate tax increase. But more than that, we knew we had to strengthen the schools, to maintain the overall economic health of the county." She prepared an Issues Mobilization Grant request, which RAR Chief Executive Officer Laura Lafayette presented to the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® in May.

In addition to polling services, consulting, and extensive staff guidance, the \$95,000 grant that RAR received from NAR funded about 40 percent of the budget for the campaign to convince voters that the meal tax was necessary. To do so, beyond contributing these substantial funds, RAR formed a coalition of major community groups including the Henrico Business Council, the Henrico Education Association, the Henrico County Council of PTAs, and even the Virginia Apartment Management Association. The coalition hired a team of local political consultants, who launched a highly organized campaign called "Yes 4 Henrico's Kids," two months prior to Election Day.

It was focused on likely voters, and its message was the importance of school quality to Henrico County. Seven direct mail pieces targeted likely voters. The campaign was promoted on the radio and through robo-calls. RAR members and staff attended the many town hall meetings addressing the referendum, bringing an active presence and leave-behind flyers. RAR CEO Laura Lafayette, whose children attend Henrico County public schools, penned a compelling op-ed piece published in the local paper, and RAR put out a targeted call-to-action alerting members in Henrico County to vote 'Yes 4 Henrico's Kids.' Shortly before Election Day, a team of Henrico County high school students knocked on doors. "They got out the vote by speaking from the heart," notes Hancock Greenfield.



The opposition fought hard, but lacked the coalition's high level of leadership, organization, and presence. At one notable town hall meeting, recalls Hancock Greenfield, a citizen was casting doubt on the need for increased school funding, when a Henrico County teacher stood up and informed him and the whole assembly - from personal experience - that local education would be more effective if there weren't squirrels poking their heads in through classroom ceilings, or desk chairs held together by duct tape. "We can't actually take credit for that moment, but it was pretty powerful stuff, and couldn't have been scripted better," laughs Hancock Greenfield.

At the end of the day, Henrico County voters approved the referendum by 51.5 percent, and the nuts and bolts of a draft ordinance on the meals tax are already being hammered out. "We are so grateful to NAR for their support of this campaign," says Hancock Greenfield. "Their level of patience, concern, and service couldn't have been any higher, and we couldn't have achieved this result without their help."

To learn more about how local REALTORS[®] helped to secure a revenue source for Henrico County that lessened its dependence on the real estate tax, contact Elizabeth Hancock Greenfield, Richmond Association of REALTORS[®]' Director of Government Affairs & Member Services, at egreenfield@rarealtors.com or 804-422-5023.

Three of the campaign mailers:

<p>Front</p> 	<p>Back</p> <p>Democratic Party of Virginia 1730 East Franklin Street Richmond, VA 23229</p> <p>PAID 10/2/13</p> <p>For just a few pennies, you can help prevent bigger classes, fewer bus routes and cuts to programs like music, art and sports.</p> <p>Your YES vote would:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Keep Property Taxes Low - Keep Property Values Strong - Keep Jobs in Henrico <p>Paid for by the Democratic Party of Virginia. Authorized by Yes 4 Henrico's Kids, Referendum Committee</p>  <p>On November 5th, vote YES on a few pennies making a big difference. Vote YES for the Meals Tax. Vote YES for Henrico's Kids.</p> <p>For More Information Go To: www.yes4henricoskids.com</p>
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Front

On November 5th,
a few pennies
can be worth so much more...

Back

8976 Three Chopt Road
Henrico, VA 22229

For just a few pennies,
you can help prevent class sizes from
increasing, bus routes from decreasing
and programs like arts, music and sports
from being drastically cut.

"Pass a Henrico meals tax,
or starve the schools."
- Richmond Times-Dispatch Column, 10/2/13

On November 5th **VOTE YES** on the meals tax.

Your YES vote on this bi-partisan measure would help prevent:

- Property tax increases
- Increased class sizes
- Decreased bus routes
- Drastic cuts to programs like arts, music and sports

On November 5th, vote YES on a few pennies making a big difference. Vote YES on the meals tax.

Paid for and authorized by Yes 4 Henrico's Kids, Referendum Committee

"Pass a Henrico meals tax,
or starve the schools."
- Richmond Times-Dispatch Column, 10/2/13

If the meals tax doesn't pass,
our kids will pay the price.

Democratic Party of Virginia
1770 E. Lee Highway, Suite
Richmond, VA 22229

Henrico
MID
MAY 2013

For just a few pennies, you can help
prevent bigger classes, fewer bus routes
and cuts to programs like music, art
and sports.

Your YES vote would:

- Keep Property Taxes Low
- Keep Property Values Strong
- Keep Jobs in Henrico

On November 5th, vote YES
on a few pennies making a big difference.
Vote YES for the Meals Tax.
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