

## Path to ECHO Vision 2040

Staff is providing the following background as context for this discussion at the request of council member(s). As the 2020 ECHO ballot reauthorization approached, the County Council made a purposeful decision not to modify the program beforehand for two reasons: (1) the significant investment of staff and advisory committee time required without any guarantee of voter reauthorization, and (2) the desire to present the existing program to voters without modifications, allowing residents to evaluate ECHO's demonstrated 20-year track record rather than newly revised parameters lacking performance history.

In early 2020, the County Council waived the annual grant cycle and directed the Advisory Committee to begin a review of the program rules and processes. Concurrently, the County's Internal Auditor conducted a comprehensive 20-year audit<sup>1</sup> examining 53 compliance areas through 2,100 individual checks. The auditor concluded the program was "running efficiently and effectively" and identified three areas for post-reauthorization review and several recommendations to improve program processes. Following voter reauthorization in November 2020 both the Auditor's and Advisory Committee's recommendations for program improvements were presented at five listening sessions across the county in April 2021. These sessions provided an opportunity to allow the community to review change, suggest new changes, or provide general comments or feedback about the ECHO program.

Voters reauthorized ECHO in November 2020 with 72% approval. A new Advisory Committee, seated in March 2021, reviewed the previous committee's recommendations and adjusted some based on feedback from the five community listening sessions held that April. The County Council subsequently adopted the proposed changes to the program on August 17, 2021.

While stakeholders closest to the program—including the previous Advisory Committee and staff—provided valuable recommendations for program improvement there remained areas that were perpetual topics of conversation like marketing, technology adoption, etc., that required action and recommendation from the Advisory Committee. As a result, the Advisory Committee recommended funding a comprehensive strategic planning process. Council approved this recommendation, the scope of work, and the award of contract to Thomas P. Miller & Associates (TPMA) to develop the ECHO Vision 2040 Strategic Plan. TPMA accomplished every deliverable outlined in the scope of work and exceeded contractual expectations through more extensive stakeholder engagement and analysis than originally required. The scope of work evaluation and compliance analysis document evaluates the deliverables provided by TPMA against the contracted Scope of Work for the ECHO Vision 2040 Strategic Plan

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<sup>1</sup> 2020-01 – [ECHO Program 2001-2020. Internal Audit Report](#)