



Howard County Council

George Howard Building
3430 Courthouse Drive
Ellicott City, Maryland 21043-4392

COUNCILMEMBERS

Courtney Watson, Chairperson
District 1
Mary Kay Sigaty, Vice Chairperson
District 4
Calvin Ball
District 2
Greg Fox
District 5
Jennifer Terrasa
District 3

Minutes (approved) Budget Work Session May 6, 2008

Chairperson Courtney Watson called the meeting to order at 9:02 a.m. on May 5, 2008, in the Ellicott Room, George Howard Building.

Members Present: Greg Fox, Mary Kay Sigaty, Courtney Watson, Jennifer Terrasa arrived at 9:10 a.m.; Calvin Ball arrived at 9:15 a.m.

The Council reviewed the operating budgets of the legislative and judicial branches, public safety, and public facilities, as follows.

Circuit Court: Suzanne James, Court Administrator; Steve Welcos, Fiscal Specialist; Judge Diane Leasure; Jen Kaiser, Director of Calendar and Case Flow Management.

Judge Leasure explained the additional 2.5 positions allowed in the budget. One position supports digital recording equipment and court reporting (funded from savings from contingent court reporters); another is a grant-funded juvenile case coordinator; and the third is an alternative dispute coordinator, also grant-funded.

Ms. Sigaty asked if the courts would seek county funds for these positions at the expiration of the grant. Ms. James said that they will try to renew the grants, but may come back in 2010 for county funds.

Orphan's Court: Sherae McNeal, Judge of the Orphan's Court

The Council and Ms. McNeal discussed the elimination of health insurance coverage for Orphan's Court judges.

State's Attorney: Dario Broccolio, State's Attorney

Greg Fox inquired about the change in the number of positions from the Council-approved budget for FY 08 to the actual FY 08 positions shown in the budget request for FY 09. Tom

Mullinex, budget analyst, explained that positions were added administratively within the budget year. Ray Wacks added that section 305 of the Charter allows within budget year administrative adjustments. Mr. Broccolino added that this change reflects a part-time employee's moving to full-time.

Mr. Fox asked and Mr. Wacks agreed to have the FY 2010 budget documents show the prior year budgeted positions as well as the actual.

Mr. Fox asked for an explanation of the OPEB costs pertaining to new employees. Mr. Wacks replied that the budget allows \$533 per county employee for OPEB; it allows lump sums for the library, school, and other non-county positions. This allowance, plus the \$15 million allowed for OPEB, and \$12 million in paygo funds constitute this year's phase-in of the OPEB unfunded liability. He says that the total unfunded liability currently is projected at \$53 million; by 2016, the County will have added \$53 million to the budget for unfunded liability. Next year, the County will be budgeting \$1000 per county employee for these costs.

Ms. Sigaty asked why the State's Attorneys have cars. Mr. Broccolino explained that only he has a take-home car; however, the other pool cars are used to pick up records, meet witnesses, and drive to other meetings.

Soil Conservation: Bob Ensor, District Manager of Soil Conservation

There were no questions for Mr. Ensor; his is a continuation budget.

Police: Chief William McMahan

Chief McMahan explained the 22 new positions as follows: 10 are to increase patrol officers; 5 officers constitute the repeat offender unit; 1 investigator is added for child abuse; 1 investigator is added for domestic violence; 1 investigator is added to the gang initiative; 2 supervisors are added; and 2 civilians free up officers now assigned to the Research and Planning Division.

Mr. Fox asked how many officers are assigned to the County Executive. Chief McMahan said there are two.

The increase in capital outlay in Animal Control is for new software to handle the processing.

Fire and Rescue: Chief Joseph Herr

Ms. Watson noted that the allowance is greater than the Department's request. Mr. Wacks explained that the difference is capital outlay (vehicle replacement) moved into the operating budget.

Most of the increase in the fire budget is related to the 6% increase in salary negotiated for employees.

The Chief summarized the needs study that is underway. Mr. Wacks explained that the Administration will be looking at the fire tax after it receives the needs study recommendations. Mr. Fox asked that the Council be brought into these discussions early in the process.

Ms. Sigaty inquired about sales of fuel to volunteer fire departments; Chief Herr replied that the volunteers have their own fuel contractors.

The Council took a break at 10:15 a.m. and resumed at 10:30 a.m.

Public Works: Jim Irvin, Director; and Karen Becker

Mr. Irvin explained the function of the new employee in Environmental Services, to facilitate movement of cars at the landfill.

Ms. Sigaty asked what service increase will result from the \$100,000 increase in the community clean-up program. Mr. Irvin replied that additional can clean-up will occur.

An extended discussion of the proposed movement of the recycling charges into the trash tax fund and of the purchase of recycling bins followed. Mr. Wacks distributed a Q & A on the recycling pilot program, which showed an increase of 25% in volume of recycling for homes equipped with large new containers and training in their use.

Mr. Irvin promised to send a summary of the history of recycling showing the growth over ten years. Mr. Irvin stated that the County's goal is to get to 50% of trash in recycling. This will moderate the expected increase in costs of trash dumping at the expiration of the current contract. The county now recycles 40+% of its trash.

Mr. Wacks distributed his analysis of tax burden, including costs of trash taxes or charges, in neighboring counties. A discussion followed about the methodology, which some questioned.

Planning and Zoning: Marsh McLaughlin, Director; Carl Balsler, Transportation Planner; Lisa Hill, Administrative Analyst

Ms. McLaughlin responded to questions about vehicle use, stating that she and Mr. Lafferty have assigned vehicles. Others use pool cars.

Ms. Watson asked about the delay in the development of a design manual for Rt. 40. Ms. McLaughlin described competing priorities and said that she hopes to get to the manual in 2009.

Mr. Balsler distributed a handout on "green" buses. A discussion followed about the relative merits to environmental protection of buying hybrid buses vs. expanding the number of buses and the number of people riding them instead of driving. Mr. Balsler explained that these buses are replacements, not additions, and that there are no plans to increase the operations.

Department of Inspections, Licenses, and Permits: Bob Frances, Director; Marilyn Weeks

Mr. Frances explained that the Department uses pool vehicles; they found that moving to county vehicles costs more, but it saves wear and tear on employees' cars.

There was a discussion about the technology request and a question whether or not that should be in the technology budget. Mr. Wacks said that technology reviewed and approved all technology requests.

Ms. Watson commended Mr. Frances on the department's responsiveness to her concerns and those of her constituents.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:02 p.m.

