

Kittleman unveils \$342.9M capital budget

Construction plans include library, senior center for Elkridge, work at college

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Howard County Executive Allan Kittleman on Wednesday released his capital budget for fiscal year 2016, a \$342.9 million proposal that focuses on education and public safety, but significantly reduces the county's borrowing.

Kittleman's budget includes \$96 million in general obligation bonds, down from \$120 million a year in the two previous budget cycles. In March, the county's Spending Affordability Committee warned of rising interest rates and recommended the county reel in its borrowing to \$90 million a year.

Kittleman said he decided to propose borrowing slightly more than that to ensure "we meet the priorities of our community, educationally, public safety-wise and everywhere else."

More than 60 percent of the borrowed money — \$58.7 million — will go toward education projects.

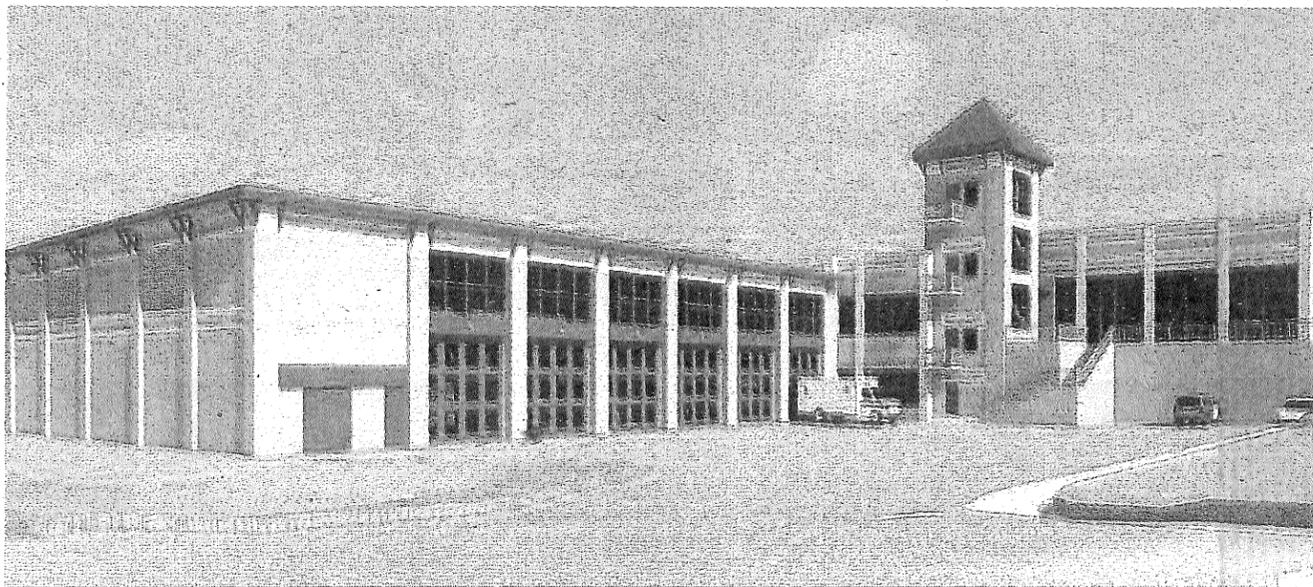
The school system will receive \$63.7 million in total, including \$41.7 million from the county. That number represents a decrease from last year's record capital investment of \$77.3 million, of which \$55 million were county funds, although Kittleman pointed out that the proportion of funding allotted to the school system compared with the total capital budget remains on par with previous years.

"Before, when you had \$120 million [in bonds], you could do a little bit more," he said.

A proposed budget submitted by the school board and Superintendent Renee Foose last fall totaled \$87.8 million, and noted that the school system is projected to grow by more than 12,000 students over the next decade. In a recent budget work session, school board members decided to wait until Kittleman unveiled his capital proposal before making decisions about projects to cut or delay.

Kittleman's budget allocates \$16 million for construction of a science, engineering and technology building for Howard Community College, which broke ground in November. The state is providing one-to-one matching funds for the project, according to Kittleman.

Elsewhere on campus, the college's



COURTESY OF HOWARD COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Howard County Executive Allan Kittleman's capital budget continues funding multiple Elkridge projects, including a new fire station, which broke ground last fall.

Nursing and Science Technology building is receiving \$913,000 to design renovations.

Kittleman has also worked out a deal to fund a new parking garage for HCC, with the county taking out a loan that will be repaid by the college through student fees.

A long-awaited new library and senior center for Elkridge will be kept on track by \$6.7 million in new funds. The project was first funded last year, with a \$22 million allotment, but costs have increased due to inflation, according to Kittleman.

Elkridge is slated to get a new fire station, as well, with money in the budget for the relocation of Fire Station 1. Columbia's Banneker Fire Station could get its own new building in the future, too — the budget funds a study to look into constructing a 30,000 square-foot replacement. Together, the Elkridge and Columbia fire station projects total \$2.4 million.

Other public safety projects in Kittleman's budget include \$2 million for a third police station, which Kittleman said would likely be located in the old Cedar Lane school in Harper's Choice, and \$8.6 million to renovate the county's detention center.

Kittleman also plans to spend \$300,000 on a new feasibility study for a planned expansion of the county's circuit courthouse. He said the cost of renovating the existing courthouse was nearly on par

with the cost to build an entirely new courthouse and he wants to examine other options, including relocating the court.

The county's stormwater fee will remain in effect this fiscal year, Kittleman said. Though he was a vocal opponent of the fee during the county executive campaign, he said he was taking the spending affordability committee's suggestion to hold off on eliminating it until a new revenue source is identified. Funding for stormwater projects in Kittleman's proposed capital budget totals \$13.4 million.

The county executive also decided to take advice from a recently released transition team report and defer renovations of the former Columbia Flier building, which former County Executive Ken Ulman bought last year as a headquarters for the Howard County Economic Development Authority's business incubator, the Maryland Center for Entrepreneurship. The transition team's report noted that the building, which the county bought for \$2.8 million, would cost another \$7.4 million to renovate.

Kittleman met individually with three of the County Council's members before releasing the budget on April 1.

County Councilman Calvin Ball, a Democrat from east Columbia, lauded the budget's funding for a new fire station in Elkridge.

But he also said he was disappointed to see that his requests for a new Waterloo fire station had again been overlooked, and he voiced concern about the school system's lower budget.

"I'd like to see increased investment in our existing schools," Ball said. "I think we need to continue moving forward with important renovation and expansion projects to ensure that our current students are in as safe and as comfortable an environment as possible."

Council Vice Chair Jon Weinstein, a Democrat whose district includes Ellicott City, Elkridge and Hanover, said he was pleased with funding for the Elkridge library and senior center, but added he hadn't had a chance yet to delve into the budget's specifics.

"I think the short of it is, [the capital budget is] a rather dramatic change from previous budgets where the [bond] obligation was higher," Weinstein said. "I understand we're heading into harder fiscal times, so we'll have to see if the priorities line up with what the constituents want."

The capital budget next moves to the County Council, which can vote to decrease or accept the budget, or change specific funding allotments, but can't increase its total amount.

A proposed operating budget from Kittleman is due April 20; both budgets will come up for a council vote in late May.