



Howard County Council

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

COUNCILMEMBERS

Christiana Rigby, Chair
District 3

Deb Jung, Vice Chair
District 4

Liz Walsh
District 1

Opel Jones
District 2

David Yungmann
District 5

Operating Budget Work Session #3 – Approved

Web-based Hybrid Meeting
Video Streamed on <https://cc.howardcountymd.gov/watch-us>
Wednesday, May 10, 2023
9:30 a.m.

Chair Rigby opened the meeting at 9:31 a.m.

Members Present: Christiana Rigby, Chairperson; Deb Jung, Vice Chairperson; Opel Jones; Liz Walsh; and David Yungmann.

Staff Present: Michelle Harrod, Council Administrator; Theo Wimberly, Administrative Manager; Lynne Blume Rosen, Roz Hightower, Administrative Support; Gary Kuc, County Solicitor; Amanda Mihill, Assistant County Solicitor; Craig Glendenning, County Auditor; Owen Clark, Deputy County Auditor; Lori Buchman, County Auditor's office.

Administration Staff Present: Noted below.

Agenda:

General Government and Public Facilities

Technology and Communications

Dr. Smith provided an overview of the proposed FY2024 Operating Budget for the Department of Technology and Communication Services and reviewed FY2023 highlights, including awards and accomplishments. He highlighted FY2024 action plans, including developing better data collection and analytics to guide future strategies and enhance the County's backup and disaster recovery capabilities. Dr. Smith discussed the plan to fill vacancies as follows: there are offers for five positions, interviewing for two positions, four positions have been posted, one was reclassified, and two became vacant last month.

Finance

Mr. Ighile provided an overview of the proposed FY2024 Operating Budget for the Department of Finance. He reviewed two positions for fiscal specialists that were created because of new legislation that resulted in more customer calls. The online platform is being better utilized. The

Office of Revenues was restructured to provide improved customer service. The County continues to earn the highest AAA credit rating from all three rating agencies.

The Council Members and Mr. Ighile discussed the hiring of a fiscal specialist who is also engaged in enforcement activities by issuing a warning before a citation. The amount in the Disposable Plastics Fund (Fund) is trending down. It will take three to four years to see if this trend continues, and if the need continues for a full position to administer the program. The position is in the Miscellaneous Billing Division. If the Fund amount continues to trend down, this person will fill other gaps. The Council Members and Mr. Ighile discussed that stores can charge fees for plastic and paper bags and the need to educate customers that the County collects five cents for each plastic bag used. Mr. Ighile deferred to the Office of Community Sustainability regarding public education about the law. The Department of Finance collects the fees from the stores.

Ms. Price discussed trends in property tax revenues, including Annapolis Junction, the Savage Special District, and Downtown Columbia.

The Council Members and Mr. Ighile discussed the process for appeals of tax assessments and the roles of the Department of Finance and the Office of Law.

Mr. Ighile reviewed the organizational chart, the schedule for interviewing candidates, and actions to fill vacant positions based on the many deadlines guiding the work of the Department.

There was discussion concerning the difficulties experienced by constituents to complete paperwork for the Aging in Place Tax Credit. Mr. Ighile discussed the online platform to address these issues. They are working with the Office of Aging to field the applications and have extended the deadline to apply for the credit.

Council Requested:

- Please provide the actual decrease in revenue for the Disposable Plastics Reduction Fund.
- Please provide an update on the status of the property tax appeals in Downtown Columbia.
- Please provide the percentage of property tax appeals in Downtown Columbia.
- Please provide the vacancy rate percentage that would trigger a decrease in the property's assessment.
- How much is the Aging in Place Tax Credit costing the County? Please provide once the tax bills are generated.
- Please provide the outstanding amounts that are still pending payment from FEMA and FHWA and indicate the status of each project.

UMD Extension

Ms. Traversa reviewed efforts to leverage County funds with State and federal funds to engage in education efforts beginning with ages five and up. She provided an overview of the UMD Extension programs and the budget savings that will result from moving to the Ascend One County owned and operated facility. She reviewed the 4H outreach programming to expand the

numbers of participants and diversity to make programs accessible to everyone, targeting Columbia. They are evaluating access efforts to make education accessible to everyone.

Soil Conservation

Mr. Calkins discussed that the proposed FY2024 Operating Budget is a maintenance of effort budget.

Mr. Calkins and the Council Members discussed:

- the receipt of funds for a conservation planner and the role of the conservation planner;
- water conservation efforts;
- education efforts;
- opportunities for soil conservation assistance outside of District 5; and
- highlights of soil conservation assistance;

Ag. Preservation

Ms. Levy provided a review of the Fund balance, what is in the pipeline, and the joint goals of assisting the ag. community to enhance operations and revenue.

The Council Members, Ms. Levy, and Mr. Mamo discussed the balance and the use of the Agricultural Preservation Promotion Fund. Discussion also included the continuation and funding of two positions in the FY2024 Operating Budget that were filled last year.

Council Requested:

- Please provide an itemization of the items included in Contractual Services and Other Expense accounts.

Planning and Zoning

Ms. Kendall reviewed the Department of Planning and Zoning accomplishments, including the completion of HoCo by Design, National Association of Counties awards, launching of pilot programs, updated software, and assistance with the updated Complete Streets Manual.

Ms. Kendall reviewed the proposed FY2024 Operating Budget for the Department of Planning and Zoning. She discussed that increases are primarily related to personnel costs that reflect the increases from Cost-of-Living Adjustments and health and retirement costs, charge backs, and closed captioning fees for Planning Board hearings. There are currently five vacant full-time positions that are in various stages of recruitment. There are two positions that are not currently funded and are not actively being recruited for but would like to keep them open for after the adoption of the General Plan.

The Council Members and Ms. Kendall discussed:

- the Gateway Master Plan process timeline and implementation and the engagement of a consultant after the adoption of the General Plan, including sources of funding for the consultant;

- the Downtown Columbia Liaison position;
- the reclassification of support positions within the Historic Preservation Commission;
- Patuxent Commons request for a waiver to disturb federally protected wetlands, removal of specimen trees, and the process for approval of alternative compliance;
- the update of the Landscape Design Manual and the hiring of a consultant after the adoption of the General Plan;
- Staffing at Board of Appeals hearings;
- Route 1 tax credits and accomplishments;
- Route 1 Design Manual;
- Department of Planning and Zoning Organizational Chart; and
- Application of Landscape Manual to County projects.

Council Requested:

- Please quantify the savings realized by performing formatting and graphic design in-house.
- Please provide the timeline for when other efforts will be considered for the Ag Pres Fund, in addition to putting properties in preservation.
- Please provide the hourly rate for the contingent position that is the liaison for Downtown Columbia.
- What stakeholders in Downtown Columbia does this contingent Columbia liaison position work with?
- Does this contingent Columbia liaison position monitor the spreadsheet related to the DRRA activities? If not, please identify the position in charge of monitoring.
- Please indicate the role of DPZ in the matter of a waiver to disturb federally protected wetlands for Patuxent Commons.
- Please confirm the funding source for a consultant responsible for updating the Landscape Manual.
- Please indicate who decides which personnel attend the Board of Appeals hearings.
- Please confirm if the County's Landscape Manual applies to County projects.

Inspections, Licenses and Permits

Mr. Francis provided an overview of the proposed FY2024 Budget for the Department of Inspections, Licenses, and Permits, which is a maintenance of effort budget with a nine percent increase. The increase is due to charge backs, salary increases, and increased costs in contractual obligations. Mr. Francis reviewed accomplishments, including enhanced online applications for services and the implementation of a new electronic plan review process.

The Council Members and Mr. Francis discussed:

- vehicle chargebacks;
- the impact of filling vacancies on turnaround times for inspections and other activities;
- challenges to fill vacancies and the impact of the HR classification study;
- how to alleviate vacancies by working with DPW to hire individuals as apprentices who will work under supervision and hiring of individuals with journeyman licenses rather than master licenses; and
- timeline for update of the Sign Code.

Housing and Community Development

Ms. Cimino provided an overview of the proposed FY2024 Operating Budget for the Department of Housing and Community Development and an overview of the housing market. The purpose of the increased funding is to help more people qualify for rental housing assistance and home ownership programs. She reviewed new positions and their responsibilities. Ms. Cimino provided an update on COVID related expenditures, including CARES Act and American Rescue funding.

The Council Members, Ms. Cimino, Mr. Wall, and Mr. Mamo discussed:

- the reason for the increase in the Housing Opportunities Trust Fund;
- the impact of decreased revenue from the transfer tax, fee in lieu of payments, and the Moderate Income Housing Unit Program;
- the Columbia Housing Center and how to fulfill its mission in other parts of the County;
- membership and temporary nature of the Housing Opportunities Trust Fund Advisory Committee;
- Section 13.402C of the County Code (Alternatives to moderate income housing unit obligation in certain zones) and sources of revenue;
- funding for the Housing Opportunities Trust Fund and the uses of the Fund;
- Formation of nonprofits similar to the Columbia Housing Center for affirmative housing initiatives;
- sources and amounts of funding for the Live Where You Work Programs and the apartment complexes that participate;
- fund balance of the Community Renewal Fund, appropriations from the Fund, and the approval process;
- community input on planned housing projects and communication to the community about the projects;
- percentage of single-family homes in the County;
- history of Downtown Columbia Plan;
- the number of low- and moderate-income apartments provided for in the Downtown Columbia Plan and the Development Rights and Responsibilities Agreement and where they would be located;
- Department expenditures for rental housing assistance and down payment settlement assistance; and
- MIHU participating communities;

Council Requested:

- Please provide the recommendations made by the Board for the projects that will be supported by the Housing Opportunity Trust Fund, once received.
- Please indicate where the statutory authority/description of the Community Renewal Fund is in the County Code
- Please indicate where the section regarding alternative compliance from the MIHU Fee-in-Lieu is referenced in the County Code.
- Please confirm the amount the Columbia Downtown Housing Commission has available for home purchases.

- Please provide the agreement with Millers Grant regarding CCRC fees that was mentioned in the work session.

Chair Rigby adjourned the meeting at 12:23 p.m.

5/10/2023 Operating Work Session Attendee List:

Budget Office

Holly Sun
Brook Mamo
Norman Schnobrich
Andrew Galarza

Technology and Communications

Dr. James Smith
Sandra Tello
Lisa Harold

Finance

Rafiu Ighile
Angela Price
Angela Moore

UMD Extension

Lynn Rubin Traversa
Charles Schuster

Soil Conservation

David Plummer
Jackie kern
Michele Cerulli
Michael Calkins

Planning and Zoning

Brian Shepter
Laura Boone
Mary kendall
Joy Levy
Jessica Bellah

Ag. Preservation

Brian Shepter
Laura Boone
Mary Kendall
Joy Levy

Inspections, Licenses and Permits

Bob Frances
Bob Firmani
Don Mock

Housing & Community Development

Kelly Cimino
Tom Wall