BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
STAFFORD COUNTY, VIRGINIA
MINUTES
CIP AND PROJECT STATUS
BUDGET WORK SESSION
MARCH 15, 2022

CALL TO ORDER – A work session of the Stafford County Board of Supervisors was called to order by Crystal Vanuch, Chairman, at 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday, March 15, 2022, in Meeting Room ABC, George L. Gordon, Jr. Government Center, 1300 Courthouse Road, Stafford VA.

ROLL CALL – The following members were present: Crystal Vanuch, Chairman; Pamela Yeung, Vice Chairman; Tinesha Allen; Meg Bohmke; Thomas Coen; Darrell English; and Monica Gary.

Also in attendance were Frederick J. Presley, County Administrator; Rysheda McClendon, County Attorney; Cheryl Giles, Deputy Clerk; various staff members; and other interested parties.

1. CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM REVIEW

Budget Director Andrea Light said that she would be providing the Board with the FY23-32 proposed CIP and the policies that support it, going through several different departments. Ms. Light stated that she would start with debt capacity, which is the total amount of debt the County can incur without jeopardizing its financial position. She noted that these limitations are in the financial policies adopted by the Board, and the County worked with the financial advisor to develop the measurements, which are considered best practices for debt capacity and reflect what other AAA bond-rated localities use. She stated that currently, Stafford's limiting factor on debt capacity is 10% of operating budget, which means the debt they pay every year cannot be more than 10% of operating budgets. She said debt capacity is reduced when they lower tax rates, and at the 78-cent rate, it would be reduction of $15.5 million over the 10 years; at 83 cents, it is a reduction of $9 million over that timeframe.

Ms. Light reported that starting with school projects, as part of their annual review, they look at the past five years to ensure they are comparable with what their fall membership is. She said they looked at the projections for FY22, FY21, FY19, etc. and found they were +/- about 1%, which is just a handful of students—which is impressive for projections. She said they have a number of projects in the proposed CIP that TRC has reviewed, and the high school is at $150 million, so staff will ask the Board through the CIP process and the rest of the budget whether they want to stay with that figure. She noted that there are additional offsite costs with that, a Drew Middle School renovation, Elementary School #18, and Middle School #9.

Ms. Bohmke said that she has had some conversations with the schools, and they have talked about this at their joint meeting with the schools, and she was not sure that renovating Drew Middle School is the right way to go and they need to explore some other opportunities.
Ms. Yeung agreed with Ms. Bohmke's statement.

Ms. Bohmke commented that she didn't have the answers, but she had met with Superintendent Thomas Taylor the previous week and emphasized to him that they needed to look at some other options. She said she hoped she was heard and that they would move that conversation forward.

Ms. Allen said she had conversations with Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Administration Chris Fulmer about possibly not repairing Drew, and it would be beneficial to have him come and discuss this, rather than her trying to relay what he said.

Ms. Yeung agreed that they needed to have him come in, as she had also had an individual conversation with him. She stated that in terms of High School #6, those students could go virtual; elementary school children need to be in a classroom in front of a teacher. She said that they need to be putting their funds at those levels, which she has been saying for a long time. She added that Drew needs to be renovated and/or expanded, and it is an issue of equity. She stated that there is a misconception about the "Fine Arts Wing" at North Stafford High School—as it makes it sound like it's for fun, but it's curriculum that students have to complete in order to go to college. She said she didn't understand why it was all the way out in FY33.

Ms. Bohmke stated that she understood Ms. Yeung's point about elementary school students but respectfully disagreed with her point about high school students, as a lot of high school students need the discipline and focus of being in a high school.

Ms. Light stated that during their joint meeting, the School Board came forward with some updated requests, which have not all been reviewed by the TRC. She stated that Elementary School #18 and the Fine Arts Wing are two projects they have considered, and staff proposed that they come forward as part of their updated request. Ms. Light said that the requests not reviewed by the TRC total $173 million in increased costs over the 10 years, and the debt capacity has only $1.8 million available—so it obviously doesn't fit in the structure as it stands today, and things would have to be adjusted. She said to fit this into the structure, they would have to have at least a 6.5-cent rate increase, or almost $14 million in additional revenue to cover the cost of the debt service over the 10 years.

Mr. Presley stated that the new updated request from the schools does include a rebuild of a new Drew Middle School, so they have already addressed that in their request, but it has not been reviewed by the TRC.

Mr. Coen asked if the 6.6-cent increase would be for everything here total, on top of the High School #6 at approximately 6 cents.
Ms. Light confirmed that it was about 5.5 cents.

Mr. Coen commented that the $150 million had not yet been adjusted for inflation.

Ms. Light responded that they do have inflation within the CIP, with schools and local government using the same assumptions, which they come up with together. She said that they bring in Bryon Counsell, John Anderson, as well as other school staff, and they look at inflation patterns and try to come up with those inflation factors; the cost for the school had been adjusted 12% in year one.

Mr. Coen said the schools had put it in at $150 million four years ago and haven't adjusted for the inflation rate. He said he knows that local government has looked at its projects but wasn't sure if the schools have.

Ms. Light responded that staff looks at the data the schools provide, and they can look at the comparisons and provide that to the Board, including what they've requested and the inflation rates over the past several years.

Mr. Coen explained that his question was straightforward to the point of whether the schools have looked at that, and there has been no indication that they have if they are still sticking with a number that is four years old.

Mr. Presley stated that he recalled the schools coming in four years ago with about $140 million, and he thinks it has been adjusted—but staff would go back and get that history for the Board.

Ms. Bohmke stated that Dr. Taylor has said that a lot of the high school estimated costs pertains to the design and footprint, and they could probably do a better job of fine tuning those numbers. She asked about the Rising Star replacement at Gari Melchers and whether that was for ages 2, 3, and 4, and whether they were all part of Head Start.

Ms. Light responded that these were early childhood education students, and Head Start is separate from this. She confirmed that it was the southern portion of the North Star and includes children with disabilities; North Star is also ECSE children that are in the northern part of the County, as they have two buildings now so that the children don't have to go as far on the buses. She said that she was not certain where the Head Start programs are held.

Ms. Yeung and Mr. Coen confirmed that they are on both sides in those same buildings.

Ms. Light stated that she and the CFO have been working with the schools and their financial advisors on how they can bundle the VPSA loan, because as a AAA-rated County, they can get a better rate if they do a standalone. She said they would typically have to go out $20 million in a borrow, but she thinks they may be able to bundle the $150 million and possibly save some interest. She said there is land acquisition in the CIP for $14 million, and as the County continues to see growth, they anticipate a natural demand for service increases; the public safety system, parks, and education are primary drivers in the CIP. She noted that while assumptions for fire and rescue stations include some assumptions about land, not all of the school requests do—with the exception of the high school—and the assumption is that they will use proffered land for middle and elementary schools, and that is reflected in the CIP.

Ms. Light stated that as the projects draw near, they will look to the guidance of the School Board and staff for population growth, how to make the best use of the new buildings, and the best placement to address the increase in population. She said the funds don't need to be appropriated with the budget but sit in reserves until they are brought forward to the Board for planning a new project. She stated that staff recommends using $4 million of the CARES Act funding that supported public safety salaries and capital project reserves; the remainder of $1 million a year would come from year-end savings. She said that if the Board agreed, staff would ask them to modify their financial policies to add land acquisition as a year-end fund balance reserve.

Ms. Allen expressed her agreement that the County needs to start accumulating and to bank for projects, and not always rely on development. She asked how they know if the schools have been using a best practice that the land being proffered is desirable for schools or other public uses, and whether it is a good approach for the schools to think the County should rely on developers to give land.

Ms. Light stated that the two pieces of land proffered to the County currently are the ones in Embrey Mill subdivision for an elementary school, which the schools have looked at and considered less desirable for their needs; and a middle school site in West Lake, which also has issues.

Ms. Allen said if they are not getting good land, they need to start relying on this as a year-end fund balance practice, because if they have to go back later and pay more to acquire land in the future, this will also have a future budget impact.

Ms. Yeung stated that the land originally planned for the elementary school is where the swimming pool is now, and they need an elementary school because of the redistricting in Garrisonville, and she wants to know whether her colleagues are considering where the statistics prove the need for an elementary school. She stated that there is land in Embrey Mill, and Park Ridge is being redistricted, with a large number of constituents who bought homes in or close to Embrey Mill who will have students in the school. She asked staff what was wrong with the land and why the schools feel it wasn't right for a school.

Ms. Light responded that her understanding is that the land site is a bit smaller than they would typically have for an elementary school. She said that John Anderson was creative and could find a way to stick a school on there—but the layout and size of it wouldn't necessarily be what they chose.

Ms. Yeung said that there was also land there for a middle school in that area, and she asked staff to confirm that there was not enough land even with that land.

Ms. Light confirmed that this was her understanding, but staff would ask Mr. Anderson to provide more information about that.

Ms. Bohmke asked if people who purchased land in Embrey Mill were told when they purchased property that there would be a school there.

Ms. Yeung confirmed that they were.

Ms. Bohmke commented, "Shame on the developer" and said that Virginia is a buyer beware state; if people did that thinking they would get to go to school there, that is unfortunate. Ms. Bohmke said she understood Ms. Yeung's concerns, but at the end of the day, you don't get to choose which school you get to go to—just that you are provided with public school.

Ms. Yeung stated that there have been those who have never been moved—often those constituents who are organized—whereas those who are not end up being voiceless.

Ms. Allen said they don't want to get into a situation where they are fitting a square peg into a round hole, even if it is creatively possible, because they didn't have sufficient space to begin with. She stated that she would rather have land that enables them to build the schools that they need and may be able to expand later.

Ms. Light presented a list of projects pertaining to judicial and public safety, which they have discussed a number of times, including the courthouse renovations; Aquia Station: Rockhill, Embrey Mill, Brooke, and White Oak Fire & Rescue stations; the sheriff's firearms range facility, and a public safety joint training center. She said that parks and recreation projects include the Carl Lewis Center, which is funded completely by proffers, to increase capacity by adding another hall, commercial kitchen, and paved ADA parking and ADA-accessible restrooms; Duff Equipment and Maintenance Shop and Chichester are to add storage areas and protect equipment. She said that both Duff and Mountain View would follow after the parks master plan and may require a bond referendum if debt is issued; Patawomeck and Musselman parks would be funded by proffers, and the cost has come down from CIP comparisons, due to reduction in projected proffer funding. She said that Two Stone Platform at River Rock was submitted after the TRC completed their work and was not included in the CIP, but it was provided to the Board as a request; this would construct a platform overlook at the site and would include ADA parking and a trail connecting it to the Historic Port of Falmouth.

Ms. Light reported that there are several transportation projects that cannot be adjusted because they have associated state and federal funding; the next round of Smart Scale funding is for FY27-28, and anything before that with state revenue is set in stone. She said the roadway safety, Brooke Road, Stefaniga Road, and US-17 Business STARS improvements were all being funded by cash, with Smart Scale money on Stefaniga and on US-17. She stated that the road bond projects are a combination of state, local funds, and bonds. She said the service districts have three sidewalk projects for the 10-year period, funded from both cash and proffers.

Ms. Light stated that the Board currently has an approved CIP budget and appropriation policy that requires all large-scale projects come before the Board to be appropriated by contract or by phase; it was enacted to provide additional oversight to school projects. She said the schools have returned unused funding as projects have closed, so there has been a shift in behavior as leadership has changed. She stated that the appropriation policy creates significant reconciliation challenges for Budget and Management, Finance, the Treasurer, Schools, and Utilities because it requires a lot of work to determine what was appropriated and when—and she doesn't believe it is providing any benefit for the Board. She said that staff recommends that all appropriations occur at the beginning of the budget and that the policy be inactivated and the Board can monitor progress throughout. She stated that Capital Construction provides quarterly reports from Mr. Counsell. She said she has spoken with the schools preliminarily, and they are comfortable with providing a quarterly report to their board or the Joint School Working committee. She stated that staff can present that to the Board as part of their quarterly financial reports to the Board.

Mr. Coen said that Mr. Anderson told them at a previous meeting that the schools have been engineering their High School #6 at the cost they want, not what is in the school CIP—but policy says they are supposed to be going with local government's number, not their own. He asked if the new policy would help the County know.

Ms. Light responded that the reporting requirement would remain the same as it is now when they ask for appropriation, so for the quarterly reporting requirements, they would still look at the budget, what they have spent, what they are anticipating to spend, so they can see which projects are coming in over or under. She noted that because of inflation, she is anticipating increased project costs—so keeping the Board abreast of both school and County projects was quite important, and this will be helpful for staff to focus more on the analysis of the projects than the spreadsheet that holds the appropriation content.

Ms. Yeung asked her to explain how the Garrisonville tax is allocated.

Ms. Light explained that Garrisonville is its own service district with its own tax rate, which is balanced to that district's needs for the upcoming fiscal year. She said that the County was very cognizant of keeping the rate what it needs to be to cover the costs. She noted that there is debt service in Garrisonville from the expansion of Garrisonville Road, so they continue to pay on that. She said that in FY23, they will see increases in project management costs because of the three projects, as well as associated costs because it is an 80/20 split as transportation alternative funds/service district.

Ms. Yeung asked if Griffis-Widewater was included here or just Garrisonville, as the projects such as roads often involved both sides.

Mr. Alex Owsiak, Transportation Program Manager stated that if the project is in the Garrisonville Road Service District itself, they would look to utilize service district funds to help pay for it—otherwise, they don't use those sources at all.

Ms. Vanuch clarified that it is on both sides of the street and is any business on Garrisonville Road on the left or the right, from the start of it to Shelton Shop.

Mr. Owsiak said that he could send them a map.

Ms. Yeung said she was looking at the work at Onville.

Mr. Owsiak said that was in the service district, but they were not using service district funds to pay for that project and were able to utilize bond money and Smart Scale Funds.

Mr. English asked how far it would go with the widening of Onville Road.

Mr. Owsiak responded that the Onville Road project currently extends from Worth Avenue, which is just north of the Garrisonville Road intersection, up to Hurley Drive, which is just short of the back gate to Quantico.

Mr. English asked if there were any federal funds for the project.

Mr. Owsiak explained that there were some federal funds coming through VDOT, but they have worked with Quantico to find other federal sources, and this project does not qualify for those funds.

Mr. English asked if Telegraph Road might qualify.

Mr. Owsiak responded that it's possible that a portion on the other side of Route 1 may qualify, but that was just recently constructed.

Ms. Gary asked how far the Forest and Woods Drive sidewalk would extend and the reason for prioritizing funding that, noting that it is a small area leading into some apartments behind Weis supermarket off of Route 1, across from Wawa.

Mr. Owsiak said that staff had identified that as a potential sidewalk project due to the underserved neighborhoods that are back there with no existing sidewalk network, as well as connections to existing FRED transit stops at the Weis supermarket and across the street at the Wawa. He stated that they submitted the project for transportation alternatives funding this round, but it was not selected, and they would more than likely be pulling this off the CIP because they don't have the County funding available to fully fund the project.

Ms. Gary commented that this is an underserved neighborhood, and hopefully they can get some funding for it in the near future.

Ms. Bohmke stated that she did not realize that the US-17 Business STARS improvements were $9.8 million, and she wondered what those improvements were.

Mr. Owsiak said that they would be making some minor widening between I-95 and Old Forge to construct a raised concrete median there to separate the eastbound and westbound traffic, as well as providing sidewalks on both sides of the road that connect to the pedestrian path under I-95 and continuing up to Old Forge.

Ms. Bohmke asked for confirmation that the County was not providing any taxpayer dollars for the Mainline project.

Mr. Owsiak confirmed that the project was funded 100% through Smart Scale.

Ms. Vanuch asked if the fire levy money would still count toward the CIP if they did an equalized tax rate and the fire levy.

Ms. Light responded that it would, because the increases are really operating budgets overall.

Ms. Vanuch commented that they have talked about the $1.9 million in proffers for Mountain View Park, and she is the only Supervisor that doesn't have a park—and she would like a dog park, which she thinks could be done for a lot less than $1.9 million. She asked if they could put together a design to utilize that as a park before the year 2034.

Mr. Morris stated that they certainly can.

Ms. Vanuch said she would like to have this as a follow-up in the budget.

Mr. Morris explained that the reason why it has been sitting in the outyears was because they assumed a lot of things could go there and they were building a bigger park; if they wanted to use a portion of the proffers now to do some things, that made sense.

Ms. Allen asked why Carl Lewis Park funding is delayed until FY26 if they are using proffers.

Mr. Morris said that he thought it was in FY23 and would doublecheck it, as he thought it was fully funded in FY23.

Ms. Vanuch emphasized that those were two good follow-ups.

Ms. Yeung asked for some details on the Austin Ridge Park.

Mr. Morris explained that it was on the corner of Eustace Road and consisted of a playground, baseball field, and open space about the size of a soccer field.

Ms. Bohmke said that she thought some of the tennis courts were going to be converted into pickleball courts.

Mr. Morris stated that they were in the 3-R projects, they just weren't listed here.

Ms. Bohmke also mentioned that the bathrooms in the Stafford High School football stadium are from 1975, and the lockers and bathrooms there are despicable. She emphasized that this needs to be put on the list. She asked if the Celebrate Virginia proffers had to be dedicated to certain services, and they were not appearing on this list.

Ms. Light confirmed that they were on the proffer sheet but had not yet been dedicated to any project.
Ms. Vanuch asked if there was anything the Board wanted to push back or take off, and said perhaps staff has some suggestions as to what they could shelve to equalize the tax rate.

Ms. Allen stated that related to sidewalks, she wondered if they had a sidewalk master plan where they were trying to show the connectivity so they know in the CIP which projects will take precedence to better build out the network.

Mr. Owsiak responded that they do not have a sidewalk master plan developed currently but do have a list of inconsistencies where they have identified where they can fill those gaps. He noted that they were undergoing a study with VDOT regarding US-17 and multimodal improvements for that corridor, and they are trying to develop a transportation plan as a whole for the entire County, which would also include sidewalks.

Mr. English said that there were sidewalks on Route 1 that lead to nowhere, and he hoped they would not do that again.

Ms. Bohmke commented that it was the state.

Mr. Owsiak elaborated that part of VDOT's requirements is providing accommodation to cyclists and pedestrians, and they can argue the point with VDOT if the sidewalks don't connect to anything—especially when considering the increased cost that sidewalks, shared-use paths, and associated right-of-way add to project costs.

Mr. Coen said he thought they had put sidewalk systems into their comp plan, with the idea that it was there, they could get proffer money.

Ms. Yeung asked for clarification of the comprehensive transportation plan and what sidewalks, trails, and elements like that fell under it.

Mr. Owsiak explained that staff had conducted a comprehensive road evaluation several years ago, which focused at looking on secondary roads and what could be done to increase efficiency and safety on those roadways. He stated that as they are undertaking the effort for their impact fee study update and transportation master plan, those should help to identify additional routes for improvement.

Ms. Allen said they already have the $13 million earmarked for the Aquia Station rebuild and were just earmarking the additional $1.8 million.

Ms. Light confirmed this and said the new CFO looked at those projects and thought it would be better to borrow for Aquia first and use cash for Rock Hill because of the low interest rates, so they are kind of swapping sources—but it is set aside for those.

Ms. Bohmke said that they have Aquia Station, Rock Hill, Brooke, Embrey Mill, and White Oak where they are selling bonds, and she asked if the Board had prioritized which ones they needed to do first.

Ms. Light responded that she wasn't certain the Board had looked at those, but TRC did a prioritization exercise with these projects and looked at them in the context of the timing that Fire & Rescue wanted those stations to fit in, given affordability.

Ms. Vanuch said she understood the existing issues with the fire stations they have already discussed and the need move forward with them, but she asked if the other three projects added—Brooke, Embrey Mill, and White Oak—could be pushed to bond referendum, since the cost was $30 million–$40 million. She stated that the public should be deciding that.

Ms. Yeung stated that there was a reason for Embrey Mill and the others, and asked if there were safety issues that were making these more pressing.

Fire Chief Joe Cardello explained that based on the standards of response coverage report, they recommended that a station be put at Mine Road and Austin Ridge Drive. He said if they didn't, the area would be subject to higher response times and potentially less coverage because Garrisonville, Aquia, and Stafford would have to make up the difference.

Ms. Vanuch said they could also upstaff Aquia with additional personnel, such as an additional EMS, because the standards of cover recommended it within 10 years. She said that is if they do the projected development and approve rezonings in that area, but if they talk about managing the growth and being conservative in their approach, they may be able to build it out longer.

Ms. Gary asked Chief Cardello how it would affect the department's ability to provide the safety services for the public if they decided to do that with a public referendum.

Chief Cardello responded that if the question is how critical the need for that station is, if you look at what is going on in that area and what is being planned, they need a station in that area—sooner rather than later.

Ms. Gary asked him to quantify what that meant.

Chief Cardello responded that they would like to be in there in three years.

Ms. Allen said the recommendation is based on Planning and Zoning input, so the need has been established, and she asked if the fire tax could be used for the construction of the buildings rather than them putting this to referendum.

Ms. Vanuch stated that the question was up to the public to decide whether they wanted to build three new fire stations to improve response times, versus the Board just deciding to implement a fire levy of 30 cents to build them.

Mr. Coen suggested that this come back to the Public Safety Committee, if the Board agreed, or if it should go to FAB if they are considering a referendum. He commented that he didn't know if they could do it this year with the fire tax issue, but it could be a larger writ large.

Ms. Yeung stated that Embrey Mill is already planned and the people are coming, with those numbers known, so this is a matter of being able to respond in time. She said that she trusted citizens would be able to vote on this, and if this goes on the ballot, it needs to be made clear that this isn't just buildings—it's making sure that their lives and families are safe.

Ms. Bohmke said they have Aquia, Rock Hill, Embrey Mill, Brooke, and White Oak, and in some of these areas the people have already been there, but she didn't know the response times and where the needs are the greatest. She said to Chief Cardello that she needed his department to tell her the priorities, based on everything going on in the County and everything on I-95—essentially who they need to do first.

Chief Cardello stated that the list before them is in priority order for what was submitted.

Ms. Vanuch said that they have the ability to get these all built in three years if they do these through a bond referendum.

Ms. Bohmke agreed but said they were still subject to the same debt service requirements, so it didn't matter whether they went to bond or through VPSA. She asked Ms. Light to confirm that they wouldn't be able to do them over three years unless they moved out some other projects.

Ms. Light confirmed that it would require moving out some other projects or increasing taxes.

Ms. Vanuch said that a referendum would give residents the say in how they wanted this funded.

Ms. Bohmke agreed but cautioned that if the bond referendum didn't pass, they would have to come back and do them anyway.

Ms. Vanuch said it's a slower process through the CIP.

Ms. Bohmke stated that the Public Safety Committee needed to look at the localities over the last five years that have done bond issuance for fire services and buildings, and look at their success rate.

Ms. Allen agreed and emphasized that they can still use the fire tax for this, and it wouldn't have an impact on their debt service.

Ms. Light said it would increase their ability to issue debt.

Ms. Vanuch stated that referendum would be giving constituents the choice, just as they did with the previous bond referendum; they didn't have that built into the budget, and the personal property taxes increased to pay for the bond referendum to be able to fulfill what the residents voted on there. She said how they raise that—either through the real estate, personal property, or fire tax—could be determined that as part of the bond referendum.

Ms. Allen said that people can still come to a public hearing and speak about the fire tax, and she just wants to ensure that people know the Board is going to make a decision that may or may not be in their favor.

The Board agreed to bring this back to the Public Safety Committee.

Ms. Light noted that the committee's next regular meeting is the second meeting in April, the day the Board adopts the budget.

Mr. Coen commented that they know there are issues but don't have a plan, and the 6.6 cents isn't sufficient to do any of this immediately—and he felt this would be part of next year's budget regardless, not this year's.

2. FIRE LEVY UPS AND DOWNS

Ms. Light stated that at their last work session, they talked about having a fire tax levy ups and downs sheet, which she presented to the Board on a spreadsheet. She said the fire tax levy as advertised is 6.6 cents, and it can be changed to any rate and calculate the impact and the change in the tax rate. She said it also allows changes in the FY23 proposed budget for Fire & Rescue personnel, and they currently have the North End battalion chiefs at midyear, and the North End and South End ambulances—so they can choose to remove these from the budget, which will reduce the personnel totals.

Ms. Light stated that there are stations that don't have sufficient staffing for an engine: Widewater, Brooke, and White Oak. She said they can take out an ambulance but not an engine that sits at the station because they don't have enough people, and it would require an addition of six personnel to meet that staffing. She said they also have some unfunded FY23 requests, as well as some additional personnel requests; planned leave coverage would allow for three additional people to provide relief at a station. She said there is a fourth firefighter proposed for four suppression units and on two suppression units.

Assistant Fire Chief Joe Grainger explained that they currently staff with a minimum of three personnel, and one of the recommendations they brought at the Board retreat was to move to a four-person suppression unit staffing to allow firefighters to do their jobs more efficiently and safely. He said within FY23, they recommended starting with a four-person staffing on four suppression units, and they also added an option to do two with four-person staffing. He noted that they currently staff seven suppression units, so this is just a piecemeal approach to eventually reach their goal.

Ms. Light said their proposed plan also allows for a complement of Fire & Rescue people in the ECC as Community and Fire Safety Life Educators, an EMS Educator, Fire Inspector, a Fleet Admin Specialist to provide support for personnel who work on the fire apparatus; currently mechanics are putting in invoices and running down paperwork.

Ms. Bohmke asked if the Board could decide which of these items they might all agree on.

Ms. Vanuch said these are additional things that were not part of the budget.

Mr. Presley stated that this was in the Fire & Rescue submittal to the County for their budget—their request, which all departments submit as what they want to see in the next year's budget. He said that the budget team then gets together and works through that to create the County Administrator's proposed budget; the items shown here were not moved forward for various reasons, but they were part of their original request and were not just added now.

Ms. Bohmke said if there were not four votes to move forward with the six cents on the tax rate, it would be a fruitful effort for them to decide now what was important and what bottom line they were considering.

Ms. Vanuch said she didn't know if they had time, because the regular Board meeting starts in 20 minutes. She stated that her understanding of the 6.6 cents proposal was to offset $14 million of the budget to this side, not to add $14 million in additional Fire & Rescue funding. She said they needed to digest this and have another meeting the following Tuesday at which they could discuss it further, with all of the lists provided to Mr. Morris and Ms. Krauss as a follow-up at the next meeting, then going through the list and making determinations.

Mr. Grainger stated that it should show in totality their requests for FY23, and the fire levy of 6.6 cents actually exceeds what the Fire & Rescue Department requested. He reviewed the priorities of the ambulances and battalion chiefs as discussed at their retreat, and the three stations in the eastern rural area where they can only provide EMS services. He said the six personnel, two per shift, allow them to get an engine or ambulance out of those stations.

Mr. Grainger stated that with the unfunded FY23 requests, the support vehicles assist them in getting their job done; the Operational Medical Director contract is included for $50K, which is currently filled as a volunteer role. He said they want to be a progressive EMS agency doing mobile integrated health and community paramedicine, and they could get a lot more out of the medical director than they compensated. He reviewed the additional personnel requests and said they could provide more information at the meeting the following Tuesday.

Ms. Allen asked if they would be able to get some of these services if they moved the $14 million from the budget to the fire levy.

Mr. Grainger responded that if they just moved that over and adjusted the general fund downward, they would see no change to current levels of service.

Ms. Allen clarified that it was contingent on the fire levy to meet these.

Ms. Yeung said that she had asked Ms. Light to provide a list of all the positions that have been requested but not filled, and she could see filling the new needed positions but can't see adding more positions on top of those facilities that have not filled those positions.

Ms. Light said that was part of the Q&A that was sent to the Board yesterday, but they could revisit that with the Board.

Ms. Vanuch said that would be a follow-up for their next meeting.

3. GENERAL FUND UPS AND DOWNS

Ms. Light stated that she was still working on this spreadsheet, but it had the capability of adjusting the tax rate to whatever rate was desired; it will not calculate anything above the 88.5-cent rate, it can go lower. She said she put in the option to increase elderly tax relief, which they are considering increasing from $3,000 to $3,500, which would be an estimated $600K in revenue. She said that personal property is advertised at $5.49, and the General Assembly did approve the emergency personal property as allowed to go below the business personal property tax, which the Governor would sign on April 11. She said that rate would be part of the Board's ability to make adjustments, and they will likely be shocked at the early projections on personal property at $5.49.

Ms. Vanuch said they need to be able to coordinate the personal property rate with what they were supposed to get versus what actually happened.

Ms. Vanuch stated that this spreadsheet was amazing.

Ms. Light said that there are budget increases that don't pertain to personnel, and the Board can remove items such as internal audit contract support.

The Board agreed to hold another work session on March 22, 2022.

Ms. Bohmke said since they are setting the tax rate on April 19, she wants to make sure there are enough opportunities for budget work sessions if they need them.

Ms. Vanuch responded that she believed they had enough built in.

ADJOURNMENT

At 2:53 p.m., Chairman Vanuch adjourned the March 15, 2022 Stafford County Board of Supervisors Budget Work Session.

Frederick J. Presley
County Administrator

Crystal Vanuch
Chairman