BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
STAFFORD, VIRGINIA
MINUTES
PUBLIC SAFETY WORK SESSION
October 12, 2022

CALL TO ORDER – A regular meeting of the Stafford County Board of Supervisors was called to order by Crystal Vanuch, Chairman, at 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, October 12, 2022 in Board Chambers, George L. Gordon, Jr. Government Center, 1300 Courthouse Road, Stafford VA.

ROLL CALL – The following members were present: Crystal Vanuch, Chairman; Meg Bohmke; Thomas C. Coen; Darrell English; Monica Gary. Pamela Yeung, Vice Chairman (arrived at 5:07 p.m.).

Absent: Tinesha O. Allen.

Also in attendance were Randal E. Vosburg, County Administrator; Rysheda McClendon, County Attorney; Cheryl Giles, Deputy Clerk; Julia Homes, Assistant Deputy Clerk; various staff members; and other interested parties.

Ms. Vanuch called the meeting to order at 5:02 p.m.

WORK SESSION
Ms. Vanuch stated that the purpose of today's meeting was a follow-up work session to address the Sheriff's Office public safety pay. She said Ms. Andrea Light would present options to the Board, and they were also joined by the sheriff and Major Dembowksi, who could be consulted for any questions that arose during the presentation.

Budget Division Director Andrea Light stated that they were present to follow up on the public safety pay, recruitment, and retention pressures with viable strategies to maintain and support public safety. She said they would discuss the public safety numbers, current public safety pay scale, state police hiring initiatives, Board-requested scale adjustments, alternative considerations, and direction from the Board. She said Ms. Wagner would discuss the first item.

Director of Human Resources Shannon Wagner said that the statistics given for the two public safety agencies were the result of Board member questions that were included in the presentation. She said in the Sheriff's Office, there were 236 authorized uniformed positions in addition to 41 Emergency Communications Center employees. She said the turnover for FY2022 was 8.2%, and it should be noted that the turnover was targeted to look at voluntary turnover only—which excluded retirements, unsuccessful academy completion, or anyone who did not leave of their own accord.

Ms. Bohmke asked what the historical data over the last five years was and if that had improved or declined.

Ms. Wagner responded that she did not have that data today but had information she could bring back to the Board after this work session. She said she believed it was a similar number within a few percentage points.

Mr. Vosburg said it did not go back five years, but they had provided the information for 2021 for comparison.

Ms. Bohmke stated that it was two years.

Mr. Vosburg said it was two years, month by month.

Ms. Vanuch noted that this was FY2022, which ended in June. She asked if that was correct.

Ms. Wagner said that was correct.

Ms. Vanuch said the reason they were present today was because of changes occurring in federal agencies and other localities changing pay, as well as empty positions. She said it would be very different as of July 1. She asked Ms. Wagner to continue.

Ms. Wagner stated that the number of employees who made over $100,000 was 29, and the number of open positions at the time of publishing the report was 24, which changed on a daily basis. She noted that a few other resignations had occurred since then.

Ms. Vanuch said the 12 positions they were adding midyear were emergency communications officers and deputies, and she asked if that was in addition to the 24 open positions.

Ms. Wagner responded that it was.

Ms. Bohmke asked why the number of staff who made over $100,000 was included in the report.

Ms. Wagner explained that a Board member had asked specifically for that information.

Ms. Bohmke asked what that information meant in a larger context.

Mr. Coen said if the discussion was about a pay increase of a certain percentage, it would affect these salaries differently. He said they had the same discussion two years ago and with Fire and Rescue, regular staff, and the school system.

Ms. Vanuch said she appreciated Mr. Coen bringing up the point and that it led to more conversations among Board members and staff about the options being shared today.

Ms. Wagner stated that there were 201 uniformed Fire and Rescue positions, and using the same parameters for turnover, in FY2022 the turnover rate was 7.3%. She said they also had 29 employees with over $100,000 in salary, and at the time of filing the report, there were two vacancies, and 15 additional vacancies would come online in January.

Mr. English asked if the Fire and Rescue staff faced similar problems as the Sheriff's Office did with recruitment.

Ms. Wagner responded that it was harder to get people in, but they did not have the same number of vacancies.

Mr. English asked about the turnover in comparison.

Ms. Wagner said the turnover was similar in percentage.

Ms. Yeung noted that it was a .9% difference.

Ms. Wagner explained that the public safety step plan was adopted by the Board in 2019 and became effective in 2020. She said the Sheriff's Office and Fire and Rescue, in coordination with her team, collaborated to establish the parameters of the scale. She said they aligned the hiring salaries for both deputies and Fire and Rescue recruits, establishing very specific formulas to identify the boundary of the scale; pay grades had a 7% gap between each grade; the steps had a 3% gap from the starting pay to the midpoint and a 2.5% step after that. She said that both divisions were facing similar market pressures.

Ms. Wagner continued that shown on the left side of the slide was market data for the sheriff and on the right was market data for Fire and Rescue. She said these were the same localities that were utilized when the public safety step plan was established in 2020 with the addition of the state police on the left. She said that was not part of the original step plan implementation, but based on the context of their conversation today, that information was included for the market average. She said in both cases, Stafford was behind, especially in the Sheriff's Office pay.

Ms. Yeung apologized for being late. She asked if they could ask questions during the presentation.

Ms. Vanuch said she would like for questions to be asked after Ms. Wagner was finished presenting each slide.

Ms. Yeung said she would like to know why they were adding the Virginia State Police into the data because they were not relevant in terms of sheriff departments.

Ms. Vanuch commented that Ms. Yeung's statement was inaccurate and asked if Sheriff Decatur could address Ms. Yeung's question.

Ms. Bohmke stated that if they took out the Virginia State Police, prior to the raises implemented by the Governor, they would have been at 94%—so were doing well before this was added.

Ms. Vanuch asked if Sheriff Decatur could answer this. She said another slide had all the federal agencies recruiting people.

Ms. Yeung asked if her question of why it was relevant to put it in here. She asked if her comment was inaccurate or if it was a question that they were going to answer for her.

Sheriff David Decatur stated that it was inaccurate, as state police as a comparison were more relevant now than any other comparative jurisdiction because when they first started the comprehensive pay study, they compared themselves to jurisdictions such as Arlington, Alexandria, Loudoun County, Prince William County, and Spotsylvania County. He said he shared at their last ARPA meeting that the state police came out with a robust and aggressive pay scale that had $15,000 more in starting pay and other incentives, which created a challenge that they were feeling in the department.

Sheriff Decatur stated that two people were leaving the Sheriff's Office, and while he could not see the future, he knew the deputies could work in Stafford County for the Virginia State Police and make a significant amount of money. He noted that this was relevant because they could take their people and did not have the same responsibilities as the sheriff's deputies who investigated all crimes and were held accountable to the community through their sworn position and oath taken to protect and serve in Stafford County. He said the Virginia State Police were a great organization but were a supportive law enforcement agency.

Ms. Yeung commented that she thought the slide might need to be updated in its language. She said it had market data for the sheriff but should say that it was for the sheriff and the state police.

Ms. Vanuch said it was referring to their own Sheriff's Office.

Ms. Yeung said it did not say that the state police were added so that was why she asked the question. She said when they said they were losing individuals, she would like to know if they were losing people in the offices as well. She asked where they were experiencing the highest loss.

Sheriff Decatur said the 911 center was where they were struggling. He said someone there resigned today and a deputy sheriff had also resigned today.

Ms. Yeung asked if they were included in there.

Ms. Vanuch confirmed that they were.

Sheriff Decatur said it was partially because of the Virginia State Police pay. He said it was difficult to predict what impact it would have, but he felt it was important for the Board to be made aware of it. He said they were struggling particularly in the emergency communications center because the workload had been increased to 18 hours and was a very technical job, so the stress and pressure were put on people who had to learn it, and it took up to two years to learn the job completely.

Ms. Yeung asked if the dispatchers were included in the market data.

Ms. Vanuch said they were on the pay scale.

Ms. Yeung asked if they were included in the slide shown.

Ms. Wagner said no.

Ms. Vanuch asked Ms. Wagner to continue.

Ms. Wagner showed a slide that included additional information from other agencies relative to the sheriff and police departments. She said the data was supplied by a Board member.

Mr. Coen said that he recalled the long work done when they updated the pay scale, and there was a lot of discussion about including some things and not others. He said he would like to understand the process of what was comparable when analyzed two years ago and what they were comparing now. He said that Albemarle County was a perennial comparison and he noticed it was not on the list. He asked Ms. Bohmke if his memory was correct that some agencies they would never compete with.

Mr. English said the environment had changed since the last time the pay scale was done. He said people did not want to get into this line of work anymore due to the high crime and the public's perception of the police.

Ms. Gary said she appreciated the points made. She said there was a unique moment where there was agreement across the political spectrum that this was something they needed to do, and they were mostly prepared to do it regardless of the implications—including potential tax increases. She said when talking about comparisons, it was relevant to compare the sheriff and the state police because people decided between the two for employment. She said she understood that while some people wanted to stay, not everyone could afford to, so considering all of these things was important.

Ms. Vanuch asked Sheriff Decatur to discuss the slide shown. She said when they discussed the pay scale in 2019 and 2020, his office dictated where their employees were leaving to go. She asked if Sheriff Decatur thought the agencies shown were relevant to their experience.

Sheriff Decatur said that Albemarle was originally used as an example as a comparison. He said they did not compete with them and never lost anyone to them, so they removed them. He said they picked the jurisdictions that they competed with. He said when looking at percentages, they were within 90%, which was average; it was not 90% to the maximum, but 90% to the middle. He said it was correct that there were some jurisdictions they would never have the same pay, but they were attempting to be competitive and be able to prevent people from leaving for other jobs.

Sheriff Decatur said the market dictated a lot of this, and it was difficult to keep up. He said he understood with teachers and County staff and with inflation. He said he brought his perspective from public safety and the Sheriff's Office. He said it did not make sense to put jurisdictions in that they did not lose anyone to. He said they lost people to other northern Virginia and occasionally federal law enforcement.

Mr. Coen said he recalled that. He said he understood, but even with the current situation, no one was rushing to work in D.C. He said some of them they did not traditionally go to, nor was anyone rushing to go. He said they found they did not lose people to Secret Service and Capitol Police because it was a different mindset. He said they discussed it in depth, and when problems arose it was because they did not include certain aspects, so he was coming from a point that there was a way to do things logically and through a process so they did not lose people, but to say that they were going to lose people to agencies that were non-competitive or undesirable.

Mr. Coen stated that his point was that the deeper analysis came into play two years ago and that was where they worked well. He said he wanted to make sure they were fixing the problem the right way and with accurate data. He said he learned about workforce training for dispatchers after 30 years of being in the school division and thought it should be promoted more.

Ms. Vanuch said she agreed the comparative should be fair. She said the gist of sharing all these different agencies was that no matter which way they compared it, Stafford was almost always at the bottom. She said she knew the sergeant of recruiting previously and they left to join the Secret Service. She said the federal agencies recruited their members because they were well-trained, so it was relevant to compare.

Sheriff Decatur said the Board played a huge part in that with funding and support. He said the pay that was implemented made a huge impact and helped make them competitive, but the market was moving and they were trying to be competitive.

Ms. Vanuch said she had met a Secret Service recruiter at the National Night Out.

Ms. Yeung said that if they only looked at their usual competitors—Prince William and Spotsylvania—Stafford's salary was $51,301, Spotsylvania was at $50,347, and Prince William was at $52,749, which seemed that they were in the middle. She asked the County Administrator to provide the Board of Supervisors with the tax rate for Prince William and Spotsylvania.

Ms. Vanuch said they were not only comparing to Spotsylvania and Prince William.

Ms. Yeung said the tax rate for Spotsylvania was 74 cents, Stafford was 85 cents, Fairfax was $1.11, Loudoun was 89 cents, and Prince William was $1.03. She said for personal property, Spotsylvania was $5.42, Stafford was $4.49, Fairfax was $4.57, and Prince William was $3.70. She said that personal property assessment was 50%, Fairfax was 85%, and Prince William was at 100%. She said if they were going to do comparisons, they also needed to look at those. She said if they were willing to give and provide the funds for the Sheriff's Office and Fire and Rescue, they needed to ask if they were willing to make taxes higher to provide this raise, because it would not be sustainable with only ARPA funds.

Ms. Bohmke said Supervisor Coen was correct that they had Henrico, Hanover, and Albemarle included a few years ago. She said now, with the northern Virginia push from the state police, the players had shifted. She said Mr. English was correct that their comparative localities had shifted some and they were looking more at northern Virginia as well as Spotsylvania and the city.

Ms. Gary said that in speaking with her constituents, everyone had been supportive. She said she had not heard anyone say that they did not support this. She said even those who were typically opposed to higher taxes said they were not worried about that in the instance of public safety because they understood the correlation. She said she encouraged any colleagues who had not spoken with constituents to do so.

Ms. Wagner said the Virginia State Police were planning to host a lateral training academy for existing certified law enforcement officers at the end of this month on October 30. She said the slide showed there was one deputy that had submitted a resignation anticipating a conditional offer. She said as the sheriff mentioned, there could be two other resignations that they did not know about. She said they had several bonuses that were listed on the website a few weeks ago when these conversations began, but two were no longer listed on the site so it was unclear if they were still being offered. She said the $5,000 hiring bonus for the lateral academy was still listed and advertised. She said there was a $3,000 location bonus and a $2,000 experience bonus.

Mr. Coen said he asked for this data because he spoke to a state trooper at his place of work who said that bonuses differed based on location. He said they needed to understand what the state police were offering so they could make distinct decisions with the correct information.

Ms. Wagner said Ms. Light would continue the presentation.

Ms. Light said they would now discuss the Board-requested scale adjustments. She said the first scale adjustment requested was to look at a 20% raise. She said provided on the slide was an annual cost. She said they looked at both salaries and estimated impact over time and provided the real estate tax equivalent for the Board's consideration. She said in FY2023 with a January implementation, for both Fire and Rescue and the sheriff, the cost would be almost $5 million. She said they could use primarily ARPA for January 1 implementation. She said that revenue replacement or revenue loss funding was about $4.7 million remaining, and these funds could be used for that purpose. She said they could consider general funds in the FY2024 for possible excess revenue, through a potential consumption tax or tax rate increases.

Ms. Vanuch said that at the last Board meeting, Ms. Light presented the FY2022 $8.8 million of additional revenue that they had not planned on. She asked if that money could potentially be used.

Ms. Light said certainly. She said it was one-time funding for ongoing sources.

Ms. Vanuch said she understood that.

Ms. Light said that they had about $8.5 million of operating revenue in excess of budget in FY2022. She said that revenue funded several different fund balance requirements, including increasing the 12% unassigned fund balance, revenue replacement, land acquisition funds, PDR programs, and transportation.

Ms. Vanuch asked how much was expendable.

Ms. Light said it was probably close to $2.5 million.

Ms. Vanuch asked if it was money that could be used immediately.

Ms. Light said yes. She said they usually asked the Board to look at any fiscal year-end funding at midyear because they wanted external auditors to be able to affirm that the year-end was what they had said.

Ms. Vanuch said that Ms. Light mentioned at the last meeting that they were $2.2 million over operating revenues for this fiscal year, FY2023, for just the first quarter alone.

Ms. Light said that in looking at sales tax, which they had received one month's worth of, they were definitely anticipating sales tax to be higher than budget. She said when they looked at all taxes, it was about 85% of the revenue budget for the General Fund. She said any changes in consumer behavior or changes in tax rate were going to affect what that bottom line was. She said she anticipated that if consumers continued to purchase at the rate they had been, the rate would increase. She said they likely would see increases in meals tax but also recordation, because interest rates were going up and people were not refinancing their homes, and that recordation rate would reduce. She said the consumer taxes depended on consumer behavior.

Mr. Coen asked about the gas tax revenue.

Ms. Light said that gas tax revenues went to the transportation fund fully to support transportation. She said usually they were about three months behind and they had not received any gas tax for FY2023. She said in FY2022, it was over budget by about $300,000.

Ms. Vanuch asked Ms. Light to continue.

Ms. Light said they were also asked what a 5% raise would look like. She said that shown on the slide were costs for an annual increase, the estimated impact to overtime, and the real estate tax equivalent. She said it was approximately $2.4 million per year; staff suggested looking at the use of ARPA for FY2023 and FY2024 so that they could ramp into what that increase would be. She said in FY2024 and FY2025, they would have to consider excess revenue either through natural revenue increases or tax revenue increases.

Mr. Vosburg said they were asked for multiples of 5% and 10%. He said they showed the 20% and the 5%; so in theory, the 5% could be doubled, and that would show what 10% would look like.

Ms. Vanuch said they could also divide 20 by 4.

Mr. Vosburg confirmed that was correct. He said they were happy to discuss any calculations between the 5% and 20%.

Ms. Vanuch said if the implementation of whatever pay raise the Board moved forward with effective January 1 of this year, any of these numbers would be cut in half because it was only paying for January through June 30, then the other half would be calculated for the other fiscal year. She said it would cost $2.4 million to implement it this year, which was only $200,000 less than the operating revenue they had available currently.

Ms. Light said that Ms. Vanuch was correct that if implemented in January, it would be for half a year. She said one of the things asked was for the Sheriff's Department to provide a 20% raise for sergeants and below on a sliding scale over two years. She said the Sheriff's Department had provided this information and their data looked reasonable that it would be a $300,000 savings to do this over the two years on a sliding scale.

Ms. Vanuch said if they were going to do this particular option where they moved forward with raises for sergeant and below for 20% effective January 1 and then did lieutenants and above beginning on January 1, 2023, and the following 10% the following year, it would be $300,000 over the total year. She asked how that would impact the financial aspect of it today. She asked if she would take $150,000 off of the $2.4 million.

Ms. Light confirmed that it was $150,000 off of it each year.

Ms. Vanuch said she asked because it was only half of a year.

Ms. Light said they would have to look at that. She said it likely would be $100,000 in the first year and $200,000 in the second year.

Ms. Vanuch said that effective January 1, there would be $2.5 million for this year.

Mr. Coen asked if there had been an analysis as to how this raise of 20% for sergeants and below compared to others. He said this issue had been raised before and meticulously analyzed.

Sheriff Decatur said they tried to maintain the integrity of the pay scale, because when they moved part of it, they created compression, for example bumping a first-class sergeant up close in pay to a lieutenant, but a lieutenant did not get overtime pay and a sergeant did, so it could create problems. He said they were looking at options to make it available to the Board and they were making options available to them as well.

Ms. Vanuch said if this were the option the Board chose, if they were to look at 20% for sergeant and below with a sliding scale raise for the others phased in over two years, she would like to know if Sheriff Decatur would be okay with that. She said Sheriff Decatur knew his employees best and who was essentially impacted.

Sheriff Decatur stated that he wanted to bring the information forward because the Board had many competing priorities, and he wanted to work with the County to provide available options. He said if it was a viable option, he would be fine with that. He said the big challenge for them right now was on the entry level, getting their starting pay up and making sure it was attractive in the market to get people in. He said the retention aspect was an issue as well because they did not want to lose highly trained professional deputies. He said moving on part and not the other created a problem. He said they had been fortunate in their partnership with Stafford County and their crime rate had continued to tick down as the population had grown, but there was an unlawful spirit in the country.

Ms. Vanuch said they saw it today at 9 a.m.

Sheriff Decatur stated that his employees did a great job keeping the community protected and safe. He said that was what motivated them to do the job. He said there was little to no relief for mental health challenges because the state had its own challenges. He said they had challenges in getting the deputies into schools, but luckily every approved position they had for every school had been filled. He said there were 13 elementary schools that they would like to add additional deputies to. He said the fatality rate was increasing because people were not driving safely. He said they had so many challenges and wanted to maintain the integrity of the force, keep experienced people there, and attract people in.

Ms. Yeung asked if there was anything other than salary that would keep police officers. She asked if they had a good environment that made the officers feel happy where they were and not want to leave for more money. She asked if there were other criteria that kept their Sheriff's Office.

Sheriff Decatur said that they had a great organization with an incredible culture that they had worked on, and men and women who came before him created that culture and they helped maintain it. He said they were far ahead of other organizations with their strategic planning, taking care of people, and while they were not perfect at solving challenges, they tried to monitor reasons why they were leaving. He said the money was a big attraction, and when young employees saw better pay and less work with the state police, they would leave for that.

Mr. English asked if Sheriff Decatur could explain that the Sheriff's Office performed all services.

Sheriff Decatur replied that they wanted to maintain that performance. He said it was a good question, because it came up with the comprehensive pay study, when Mr. Dudenhefer brought up leadership and management, making sure people were happy, and not demotivating them.

Ms. Yeung said that if there was a group that was not being promoted over time, it was demotivational.

Sheriff Decatur responded that this was not happening in Stafford, because they brought people from outside agencies in and were put through an assessment center, so it was not himself picking those people. He said there was a process.

Ms. Vanuch said that they had previously discussed the concerns of people were leaving, and after conversations with deputies in Spotsylvania County and Prince William County, it was understood that Prince William was discussing disbanding SWAT and K9, and Spotsylvania had already disbanded their traffic safety unit because of manpower challenges and because they had to have minimum staffing standards. She asked if Sheriff Decatur could discuss what would happen if they continued to lose people at the current rate and if other localities raised pay and Stafford did not.

Sheriff Decatur explained that they contended with the challenge of additional workload and fewer people with working overtime, which could have a negative impact over time because people had to do more work and work longer hours. He said that could demotivate people and burn them out. He said they would have to take people from traffic safety, crime prevention, and special problems units to cover shifts to have minimum manpower standards for each shift to answer the calls and do the police work. He said the last resource they would pull from would be school resources because that was such a top priority. He said they were not at that point yet, and he brought this matter to the Board to prevent it from becoming an emergency situation.

Ms. Vanuch asked Ms. Light to continue.

Ms. Light mentioned that staff had provided one alternative consideration. She said they acknowledged there were some additional pressures for recruiting and retention, so if the Board directed them, they may look at a bonus structure for those who were already there or recruit new people as well. She said if they were to do a bonus, it would require a public hearing. She said in this alternative consideration, they also had a scale adjustment that maintained the public safety scale, and this scale adjustment would apply to both Fire and Rescue and the sheriff as a midyear scale adjustment of 5% and a July 1, 2023 adjustment of 5% at the cost of $3.7 million.

Ms. Light said they had several months to look at that throughout the budget process, so today they were saying 5% through the budget process, either through County Administrator's proposed budget or through Board work sessions after that, they would continue to look at what that data looked like and what the market looked like to adjust the 5% to fully meet those needs.

Ms. Bohmke asked to see the previous slide. She asked if Ms. Light had said that with the scales in FY2024, they would be adjusting with the 5% at a cost of $3.7 million—irrespective of what they did if they chose to do anything right now.

Ms. Light clarified that it would be a 5% raise midyear and an additional 5%, for a total cost of $3.7 million.

Ms. Vanuch said this was only talking about a 5% scale adjustment right now, effective January 1, and then as part of the budget process another 5% increase. She said it was likely the County Administrator's budget would already have a 5% increase for staff compensation because they now knew the state's two-year budget.

Ms. Bohmke asked if this would be the cost of the 5% if the Board chose to go in this direction.

Ms. Vanuch said it would be 5% now and 5% for the budget. She said that the additional five needed to be completely taken out so they could look at it through the budget process.

Ms. Light explained that the two 5% increases would be achieved through ARPA funds for FY2023 and part of FY2024 as they ramped into using the General Fund excess revenues, natural growth, or tax rate increases. She said it provided a mechanism for the Board to look at raising tax rates or using some of the natural increase over the next two and a half fiscal years. She said it put the beginning salary in a much more competitive range and maintained the public safety pay scale. She said finally, they were looking for the Board's direction. She said at the last work session, they had been asked to bring this back on the October 18 agenda, so that was all due to be published tomorrow. She said they would like the Board's direction for what they would like to see come back.

Mr. Coen asked if they knew where the state police were targeting, which he understood to be at the entry level.

Sheriff Decatur responded that they were looking for experienced law officers as well. He said they had the lateral transfer program where people would do reduced academy. He said that once certified, an officer was very marketable and did not have to go through the academy again, but because the state police had their own academy, there was a shortened version.

Mr. Coen asked if they were targeting specific experienced people.

Sheriff Decatur said they were targeting everyone. He said when they started their new pay scale, they had a step and grade as well as points of credit for years of service. He said they were looking for all of that, and they were all under the same Virginia Retirement System.

Ms. Bohmke said she would like to know where the 911 workers were in the whole plan. She said she saw it in one slide but did not see them in compensation models. She said if they were giving Board direction, those workers were an integral component to this entire conversation, and she did not feel that she was in a position to make any decisions without that piece.

Ms. Vanuch noted that those workers were considered sworn officers, so they were included in those pay scales.

Mr. English asked what the starting salary was for dispatch.

Ms. Wagner replied that Ms. Krauss just left to get the market comparison. She said when Ms. Yeung asked if they were included in the market data, they were not; those salaries were only for the deputies and not for dispatchers. She said that would show where they were at currently as well as other market data.

Ms. Bohmke clarified that the 236 uniform sheriff position mentioned on page 6 of the presentation did not include 911 dispatcher positions.

Ms. Wagner responded the 911 dispatcher positions were included in the 41 positions listed below the figure for the 236 sheriff positions.

Ms. Bohmke asked if the 41 positions were included in the 236 positions.

Ms. Wagner replied that the 41 positions were in addition to the 236 positions.

Ms. Bohmke noted that there would then be a total of 277 uniformed positions.

Ms. Vanuch said the way it would be communicated is that they were sworn officers.

Ms. Bohmke clarified that the numbers had been calculated into the rest of the presentation.

Ms. Wagner explained that the figures were calculated into the cost estimates within the presentation.

Ms. Bohmke said the state police had put the County in a tough position. She noted that the Board had prepared to make salary increases in the future and that they were behind in salary levels. She said addressing the item in the middle of a budget year was challenging. She noted the Sheriff's Department had undergone implicit bias training for 11 or 12 years, and she had no negative comments about the public safety services.

Ms. Bohmke emphasized that a rule of budgeting was to never use one-time funds for recurring costs. She noted the burden that would be placed on residents and the potential for a recession—and depending on the economist, the recession was predicted to be deep. She said the County was somewhat insulated from the effects due to the number of federal employees in the County.

Ms. Bohmke said she could not support imposing a 20% raise with the existing debt service and other expenses of the County. She suggested a 5% raise along with a $2,500 bonus as an alternative proposal.

Ms. Vanuch noted that the Board voted the prior year to provide 24% pay increases to bus drivers totaling $2M in a recurring cost that was absorbed into the budget. She said the County had to take action when it was facing circumstances that were crucial to the community. She said the sheriff had ensured support was bipartisan. She said the people who attended National Night Out would support a 20% raise.

Ms. Vanuch pointed out that the hourly pay rate for bus drivers was the same for a starting deputy, and a 10-year teacher makes the same amount as a 10-year deputy with two promotions. She asked Mr. Vosburg what the ALICE salary was countywide.

Mr. Vosburg responded that the latest data was about $49K.

Ms. Vanuch said the starting salary for a deputy was $51K. She emphasized deputies were paid only $2K more than the ALICE level. She said Prince William was likely to pass a 24% pay scale increase. She noted Manassas Park had a starting salary of $63K. She noted the revenue replacement numbers existed—there was $2.2M to allocate for the year which could pay for the 20% increase from January 1 to July.

Ms. Vanuch noted that there were ARPA funds that could be phased in over the next two years to offset the costs. She said they could implement pay scale increases for sergeants and below and work on the other two phases at a later date to keep costs down. She said County officers would leave for other jurisdictions once they implemented higher pay scales.

Ms. Gary clarified that one-time funding had been used previously for pay increases.

Ms. Vanuch explained that one-time funds were used in 2021 to provide 24% salary increases to bus drivers resulting in a $2M annual cost. She said Mr. Coen had motioned to make the item sensitive, and Ms. Bohmke had seconded the motion, which passed unanimously with five votes and two absent supervisors—Ms. Allen and Mr. Dudenhefer.

Ms. Gary said the 2021 salary increase would have tax implications.

Ms. Vanuch stated that during the meeting on the prior topic, she was the only supervisor to ask a question, and she read an excerpt from the minutes:

"Ms. Vanuch asked what the increases would mean for next year as those would be recurring costs. Mr. Fulmer estimated $2M based on current bus drivers, and they know they would need to fill additional vacancies so that number would only go up. He noted that they had tremendous feedback and increased applications since this was announced, with CDL and non-CDL applicants in a very flush applicant pool. He noted that they were very fast-tracked and very excited to get them on the road."

Ms. Vanuch stated that deputies were waiting on the Board to make a decision on pay scale before they turned in their notices. She said she did not want to be responsible for what would happen if a big crime happened in the County and they did not have the public safety personnel to respond.

Mr. English pointed out the political effort to defund the police. He said people did not want to stay in law enforcement, as they were following higher-paying jobs and careers. He emphasized that the County had to respond.

Ms. Gary asked what the next step in the process would be.

Ms. Vanuch said the deputies should have an answer. She said whatever was proposed would be addressed at the October 18 Board meeting, but the deputies should know sooner. She said the County could retain more deputies if it took corrective action. She said many individuals may leave the County's force if they did not institute the pay raise. She said the cost to raise the salaries of first sergeants and below by 20% was about $2.2M to implement from January through the end of the fiscal year. She noted there was another cost of $4.6M.

Ms. Vanuch stated that there was a projected $2.2M in additional revenue for the first quarter of the next year which could pay for half of the pay increase cost. She suggested $2M in ARPA funds could be used for the two following years. She noted concerns about the impacts on the tax rate but said the County had to keep deputies in the County.

Ms. Bohmke said there was a difference between the raise for the bus drivers and the item they were considering at the work session. She said the bus driver raise was a smaller amount of money, and the County was in an emergency because they did not have bus drivers to drive the buses. She said the present conversation was not fair. She noted that the sheriff was stating there was a concern—but not with the same emergency that Ms. Vanuch expressed.

Ms. Bohmke said she wanted to take a more tempered approach and provide some type of raise and bonus for the deputies. She said given the information provided by the sheriff, she was not in a position to support a 20% raise. She said the sheriff was not indicating the same amount of urgency as Ms. Vanuch, and it was not fair to state the onus would be on the Board. She said the Board had to be more methodical, deliberate, and intentional with the decisions it made.

Ms. Gary said if the sheriff was panicking, she would be worried. She said she did not want the sheriff to get to the point where they were coming to the Board with an emergency because she wanted to prevent emergencies from happening. She said by the time the sheriff was coming to the Board with an emergency, it was too late. She said action from the Board would be a preventive measure, and she did not want to sacrifice public safety.

Ms. Yeung stated that in terms of defunding the police, no one was trying to defund anything. She said the County cared about the police department, fire and rescue, and public safety. She said she would not agree to pay salary increases with ARPA funds. She said if the County was willing to provide the raise to public safety personnel, then funding would have to be allocated from somewhere. She clarified the County did not have enough incoming tax revenue to afford the salary increase.

Ms. Light explained that at the current tax rate, excess revenue was not projected that could fund the salary increase.

Ms. Yeung said she would lean on Ms. Bohmke's reasoning and wait until the budget season to figure out a more detailed plan. She said she was willing to provide bonuses according to pay scale and outside of leadership for Fire and Rescue and the Sheriff's Office. She said the bonus recipients had to include 911 dispatchers. She noted Fire and Rescue did not have the same support staff as the Sheriff's Office.

Mr. Coen said it would be unconscionable to approve an item when they did not know the budget impacts for two or three years out. He said they painstakingly reviewed the work done by staff to draft the pay scale. He said the way to destroy the morale of an organization was to promise pay scale step increases and then freeze the pay scale at a later date. He noted the importance of five-year planning for budgetary stability.

Mr. Coen noted sales tax revenue had increased because inflation had increased the price of goods, and at some point, people would stop buying things. He said they needed to be fiscally responsible.

He said when he joined the Board, he committed to addressing the pay scale, and there needed to be long-term fixes.

Mr. Coen questioned whether the County would continue to rush to match other jurisdictions in pay each time they decided to increase salaries. He said they had to have a long-term solution. He said the Board turned to staff for solutions, and he wanted staff's input as to the viability of the solutions.

Mr. Coen stated that something had to be done regarding the dispatcher issue because pay raises were not working. He said dispatchers were given a pay raise in 2020, and they were still facing staffing issues, and they needed something substantive to deal with the problem. He said there were programs through school systems in other parts of the Commonwealth, but those items were not before the Board. He emphasized it was a point of immediate crisis.

Mr. Coen said the Board should have considered the salary increase in March—and it was unconscionable to state support for the salary increase while refusing to increase taxes. He said he was uncertain of bonuses because of the tax burden, and he was considerate of increasing people's income brackets. He said the Board needed to approach the item deliberately.

Mr. Coen said if the target enactment date was January, then they did not need to rush for the October 18 meeting to take action. He said there was more information to review before they took action.

Ms. Gary noted that there had been pay-scale adjustments. She said they were in unprecedented times, and everything had gotten more expensive. She said employing safety professionals had become more expensive, as well. She said fiscal responsibility did not equate to not spending money. She said it was about fraud, waste, and abuse not happening. She said fiscal responsibility included investment, and the salary increase was an investment in the public safety personnel.

Ms. Vanuch said in terms of taxes, anyone who attended National Night Out would support tax increases if they knew the funds would go to a 20% pay increase to keep and recruit the best deputies to serve the County. She said employees at the Sheriff's Office had to work required overtime and holdovers.

Ms. Vanuch stated that the sheriff had told her they would never risk the level of service because the staff would take on the work. She said it was the Board's responsibility to take action to fill the 24 current empty positions and 36 empty positions in January. She noted that 24 deputies represented almost an entire day's shift. She said the County needed more officers. She said the staff currently filling the roles will start to make mistakes and start to leave the County's forces.

Ms. Vanuch expressed that this was an emergency. She said it was an emergency that the dispatchers worked required 18-hour days. She said it was not right that bus drivers and deputies made the same amount of money. She explained that 20% of $22/hour was only about a $4 raise, so the County could afford it.

Ms. Vanuch said she would raise taxes to fund the salary increases. She said she did not care about being a Republican or getting reelected because she cared about ensuring the community was safe. She said she would do whatever was necessary. She said the County had the funding for the increase, and ARPA funds could be used to offset the tax increase if phased in. She said a 5% raise was a joke, and employees would leave at a 5% raise.

Ms. Vanuch pointed out that bonuses did not count for retirement. She said the employees should not have to wait on the Board to plan their financial futures, and she would like the Board to consider moving forward with the 20% raise for first sergeants and below.

Ms. Vanuch said they could work with staff on a proposal to use the $2.2M in leftover operating revenue to fund the salary increases and create an outlook for the following years regarding phasing in ARPA funding to pay for half of the cost. She said the ARPA fund guidance encouraged localities to use ARPA funds for minimum 10% pay increases for agencies, personnel, or departments facing critical challenges.

Ms. Vanuch said using the ARPA funds for 10% raises in the following tax years would offset the necessary tax increases. She noted they already performed a salary increase for bus drivers. She said in January, there would be 36 open deputy and emergency operations positions.

Ms. Vanuch noted that during the bus driver salary increase presentation, it was stated the salary issues caused stresses across the system, meaning drivers had to perform extra trips that took longer. She said it was similar to how the deputies had to work—required overtime, longer shifts, and changing positions. She questioned what would happen when crime increased.

Ms. Yeung said the bus driver situation was a compounding issue. She said there were more students and fewer buses and bus drivers. She said bus drivers were beginning to not show up to work. She asked what the Board's action would be coming out of the meeting.

Ms. Vanuch said she was trying to figure it out.

Ms. Bohmke said there was a Board meeting on Tuesday. She said the item was scheduled for New Business for the October 18 agenda. She said for the item to move forward, the Board would have to wave its bylaws by a 2/3 vote.

Ms. Bohmke asked for clarification on whether the ARPA funds could be used for retention of emergency personnel.

Mr. John Munch explained that the provision mentioned by Ms. Vanuch was the retention incentive, listed on page 184 of the final rule. He said there were stipulations to the provision—the individuals the funds were applied to had to be shown as likely to leave employment. He said in certain circumstances, the funds could be used. He said the County would also have to meet the requirement that the use of the funds was narrowly tailored to meet the need. He said a department-wide provision of the funds would be a challenge to justify.

Ms. Bohmke asked for clarification regarding the limitations on department-wide use of funds.

Mr. Munch responded that they could not justify that the entire Sheriff's Department was likely to leave. He said he was not sure how to justify the 20% increase to a group of employees as exceeding the reasonable portion.

Ms. Bohmke asked what the consultant's opinion was on the topic.

Mr. Munch responded that the opinion was similar. He said when applied to a group, the group had to be less than 10%, and if it was applied to individuals, it had to be less than 25%. He said if someone came in with a resignation letter and the County wanted to have funds to apply to that situation, then they could go as high as 24.99% for the retention incentive for that particular employee. He said if the funds were used on a case-by-case basis, then the documentation would be available—such as a resignation letter or an offer letter—where they could narrowly tailor the use of the funds.

Mr. Munch explained if the Board applied the rules too broadly and provided funds to employees not likely to leave, then they ran a risk of having to repay the ARPA funds that were used and support the cost with General Fund revenue.

Ms. Vanuch noted that the funds could be used for 10% of a group or category of employees, which was part of the reasoning for separating out the lieutenants. She said when they discussed with the sheriff the likelihood of individuals leaving, patrol deputies and emergency communications officers were most at risk. She said when compared to other jurisdictions, a first sergeant could leave County employment to work with the state police and get a $20K pay raise.

Ms. Vanuch said the funds should be liberally attributed, and the point of the Treasury guidance was to provide localities with the flexibility to use the funds for retaining workers and avoiding layoffs. She noted the ARPA funds could not be used to cover the full cost of the 20% raise, but they could be used for 10%. She said the comparative jurisdiction data was important for an audit.

Ms. Yeung clarified that there were 24 open positions in the Sheriff's Department. She said the last time she spoke to the sheriff, there were 17 open positions, and those positions were open prior to the sheriff discussing the raise with the Board for the first time. She said they were only addressing seven open positions. She asked if of those seven positions, were any 911 dispatchers. She asked how many officer positions were open if the number of open dispatcher positions were taken out of consideration.

Sheriff Decatur said the open positions discusses factored in the telecommunicators. He said one additional open position could be added because someone resigned that day.

Ms. Vanuch clarified that a deputy also resigned that day.

Sheriff Decatur confirmed that was correct—a deputy and a dispatcher had resigned.

Ms. Vanuch noted that there were then 26 open positions, and there would be 38 open positions on January 1.

Ms. Yeung asked if the deputy who resigned left for the state police.

Sheriff Decatur said the deputy did not leave for the state police.

Mr. Coen noted that Ms. Vanuch had mentioned layoffs. He said an element of the ARPA funds was to prevent layoffs, and he wanted to know the consultant's opinion.

Mr. Munch said the specific section referencing the retention incentive was not tailored toward layoffs, but to maintain current employees with offers from elsewhere. He said the section specified employees "likely to leave."

Ms. Vanuch asked if Ms. Light would be able to come forward with a plan to pay for the salary increase. She suggested using the leftover operating revenue from the current year. She said Ms. Light should bring forward a comprehensive plan. She noted there was $4.6M of ARPA funding available to use.

Ms. Vanuch said it was the Board's responsibility to pass a budget a prioritize certain items. She said if they were prioritizing public safety as it had in its strategic plan, then it had to be prioritized in the budget. She said if the economy went into a recession and they had to enter into a step-hold, then the deputies would understand. She said it was the Board's job to prioritize the needs at the time, and they could not predict what would happen in two or three years.

Mr. Coen noted that two suggestions were offered by Ms. Vanuch and Ms. Bohmke. He said unless they did a straw poll, then both options should be explored and brought back before the Board for more information.

Ms. Vanuch said that could be a likely scenario.

Mr. Vosburg said he had not received a consensus, but once the Board reached one, he wanted to describe what he understood as the Board's directive.

Ms. Gary said that since Ms. Allen was absent and the Board was undecided, bringing back both proposals was a wise decision.

Ms. Vanuch agreed, noting that there were other options besides the two proffered by Ms. Bohmke and herself. She said staff should return with information providing the cost and how the County would fund 20%, 15%, and 5% salary increases for first sergeants and below.

Ms. Yeung said that although Ms. Allen was absent, she had provided a response to the County Administrator as to her position. She did not know if that was considered in a straw poll.

Ms. Vanuch stated that Ms. Allen had not communicated her stance to the Board.

Ms. Yeung said they would still have to take an action as to how to move forward.

Ms. Bohmke said it would be productive for staff to also consider a 7% or 8% raise.

Ms. Yeung said that staff should also consider only bonuses based on pay scale as a baseline.

Ms. Vanuch noted that the prior year, bonuses of $3,000 cost the County almost $1.5M. She said bonuses would be almost the same cost as providing the 20% raise. She said the bonuses were only one time and did not count toward retirement. She said they would not address the root cause as to why staff was leaving with bonuses.

Ms. Bohmke commented that the difference with bonuses was that the County was not using one-time funds for recurring costs. She said they understood the finances of bonuses, but there were different perceptions on the Board. She said bonuses were for retention and noted how the state police were also using bonuses.

Ms. Vanuch said the state police also provided a 26% pay increase in addition to the bonus.

Ms. Bohmke mentioned that the state police were obviously struggling. She said there were different ways to look at situations, and Board members could have different perceptions.

Mr. English asked Mr. Vosburg to provide the options as he understood them.

Mr. Vosburg explained that option one focused on first sergeants and below at 20% effective January 1, 2023, with lieutenants and above at 10% on January 1, 2023, along with another 10% increase on January 1, 2024. He said within that suggestion, there would be information for a 15% pay raise for first sergeants and below and a 7.5% pay raise for lieutenants and above. He noted there was a suggestion for a 5% increase and an 8% increase and asked for clarification on which one to pursue.

Ms. Vanuch said they already had the information for 5%, so that information could be carried over. She said staff should review a 7% or 8% raise.

Mr. Vosburg said they would look at an 8% raise, as well. He asked Ms. Bohmke for clarification on her suggestion for the second option. He noted Ms. Bohmke proposed a 5% raise and a $2,500 and asked if the raise was across the board to include all public safety or targeted for the Sheriff's Office or a certain rank.

Ms. Bohmke said that would need to be a discussion addressed by the Board.

Mr. Vosburg said they would show the second option with figures to include all of public safety as well as those targeted to the Sheriff's Office.

Ms. Bohmke said the Board needed to discuss the item. She said the public safety scale had been passed two years prior, but things had shifted. She said the Board had to decide whether to consider public safety as a whole or to target the Sheriff's Department.

Ms. Gary said she wanted to look at what it would look like in the future to do increases over time.

Mr. English said they should target the Sheriff's Office because Fire and Rescue was not having the same problems.

Ms. Vanuch noted that the item would be on New Business on the agenda. She said she thought the Board would have understood the gravity of the situation and moved forward with raises. She noted there was not the same urgency with Fire and Rescue, so she had reservations about bringing that information forward at the meeting.

Ms. Gary said she would want to consider the raises during the budget process, but she would want information on the topic.

Ms. Vanuch said they could hold another public safety work session to consider those topics.

Ms. Yeung stated that she wanted to review the bonuses, which would require a public hearing. She said she was not sure what the bonuses should be, but she wanted to include Fire and Rescue in the consideration and asked for historical information on bonuses provided to them.

Ms. Vanuch noted that bonuses were provided to Fire and Rescue the prior year.

Ms. Yeung said she was focused on retention and recruitment, and she wanted a well-thought-out plan for the pay scales.

Mr. Coen noted there were two paths—use the leftover revenue and ARPA funds or use the leftover revenue and increase the tax rate. He pointed out that this would apply to all the options and clarified that each of the options would take effect in January.

Ms. Vanuch commented that they were on the same page as to when the salary increase would go into effect. She said staff had indicated they would need a couple of months to implement the pay increases, and the impacts to the pay scale would be significant.

Ms. Vanuch noted that HR had drafted a potential 20% pay scale increase. She said she did not want to lose sight that it would take staff time to implement the Board's decision.

Ms. Yeung said she was referring to a timeline around the budget season, not January 1.

Mr. Coen said the comments other than Ms. Yeung's supported January 1 effective dates with a second phase in the next fiscal year.

Ms. Yeung clarified that the bonuses were for January, but the rest were for the budget.

Mr. Coen explained that for the 20% option, there would be a 20% raise for certain positions and a 10% raise for others effective January, and the other plans had raises effective in July and August.

Ms. Vanuch said the majority of the Board wanted to evaluate actions that would be effective January 1. She said they wanted to decide if the action taken would be on a bonus, a 5%, 7%, 8%, 15%, or 20% raise.

Ms. Bohmke noted the issues with the Sheriff's Department and said the compensation study was performed because they were experiencing similar issues with Fire and Rescue. She said they needed to keep the departments together because they responded to calls together.

Ms. Yeung said she agreed.

Ms. Bohmke said if raises were considered by the Board, then they should be effective January 2023.

Mr. Coen stated that they needed to figure out how to fix the dispatcher issue because the money was not solving the problem—and they needed a long-term strategy.

Sheriff Decatur explained that telecommunicators made only $40,600. He emphasized that an increase in pay was indeed part of the solution.

ADJOURNMENT

At 6:59 p.m., Chairman Vanuch adjourned the October 12, 2022 Public Safety Work Session of the Stafford County Board of Supervisors.

Randal E. Vosburg
County Administrator

Crystal Vanuch
Chairman