BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
STAFFORD COUNTY, VIRGINIA,
MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING
FEBRUARY 24, 2026

**CALL TO ORDER** – A regular meeting of the Stafford County Board of Supervisors was called to order by , Chairman, at 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, February 24, 2026 in Conference Room ABC, George L. Gordon, Jr. Government Center, 1300 Courthouse Road, Stafford VA.

**ROLL CALL** – The following members were present: Deuntay Diggs, Chairman; Maya P. Guy, Vice Chairwoman; Tinesha O. Allen; Pamela Yeung; Darrell E. English; Crystal Vanuch; Kecia S. Evans.

Also in attendance were Bill Ashton, County Administrator; Rysheda McClendon, County Attorney; Sukhi Purewal, Deputy Clerk; various staff members; and other interested parties.

**ADDITIONS - DELETIONS AND APPROVAL OF THE REGULAR AGENDA**

ADD ON TO ITEM NO. 5; UPDATED TRANSPORTATION BOND STATUS UPDATE ATTACHMENT AND TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM (TAP) NEXT STEPS ATTACHMENT

Bill Ashton, County Administrator, said that they had added the Transportation bond status update and Transportation Alternative Program (TAP) next steps attachments to the Item 5 on the agenda. He said that errors had been corrected on both the bond status and the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) updated TAP projects. He said that the updated documents were attached and available in the Agenda Center.

**WORK SESSION ITEMS**

ITEM 1. TREASURER, MIKE SIENKOWSKI, BUDGET PRESENTATION

Mike Sienkowski, County Treasurer, said that he would like to share some nuances about his departmental budget request and leave the decision in the Board's hands. He said that to provide some background, he would briefly review his previous budget requests. He said that the last time they had added a new position was in 2021, and in 2022, they had successfully converted a part-time position. He said that last budget cycle, he had requested two revenue collection specialists, which were not prioritized and went unfulfilled. He said that this did not mean that their need had diminished; to compensate for the lack of staffing, he had transitioned one of his collection and customer service staff to handle procurement and contract needs. He said that to make up for that additional workload, he had redesigned their collection process, implemented automation to assign priorities to certain accounts, and distributed the workload between people with technology. He said that they had also benefited from technological advancements that expedited the collection process.

Mr. Sienkowski said that unfortunately, they now faced a problem, which was that they had an unfunded mandate stemming from the State's House Bill (HB) 1100, which limited the

Treasurer's lien authority to 25% of disposable earnings in a single pay period. He said that this meant that unless an individual's earnings exceeded 250% of the poverty line, adjusted for family size, they could only collect 25% of each paycheck towards a lien. He said that additionally, their liens were capped at $11,000. He said that they had issued 3,200 liens in Calendar Year (CY) 2025, consisting of two mailings: the intent to lien and the actual lien letter sent to the bank. He said that they had found that they collected more from the intent to lien letter than from the actual liens. He said that however, with this new bill, research would be required on each account to determine how much they could collect from each individual. He said that this was creating a problem, as it was likely to result in a significant decrease in collections.

Ms. Vanuch asked if HB 1100 had been passed into law yet.

Mr. Sienkowski said that it was vetoed by the Governor last year, but it had made it through crossover during this year's General Assembly session. He said that it was likely to pass this year.

Ms. Vanuch asked Mr. Ashton if Mr. Toigo could add this bill to their legislation tracker so they could be notified of whether it passed or not.

Mr. Sienkowski said that the additional problem this created was that they could still be collecting on a bill, and then another bill became past due due. He said that this situation could result in multiple liens being placed on one individual.

Ms. Guy asked for more information about the differences between the amounts collected on the intent to lien letters versus the lien letters.

Mr. Sienkowski said that when they sent someone a letter stating they were going to lien them , many people reached out to them and paid before the lien took effect, and this was where the $343,000 came from. He said that as the County continued to grow and the complexity of managing revenue, payments, and financial reporting increased, it was essential to maintain strong internal controls, ensure continuity of operations, and meet rising service demands. He said that to achieve this, they needed to invest in personnel to maintain service levels and create capacity for future growth. He said that he had requested a new full-time position for a revenue collection analyst, a mid- to senior-level position that bridged the gap between regular staff and low-level supervisory duties. He said that he had also requested the conversion of an existing part-time position to full-time.

Mr. Sienkowski said that he had noticed that the latter position was listed in the unfunded items as the full amount of the actual position, not the difference, so he would clarify that it was not $70,000. He said that he would provide the actual amount later in his presentation. He said that some of his other requests included increases in contracts with Brinks, PCI, and postage. He said that he had previously requested a postage increase last year to account for the January increase, but they did not receive it. He said that as a result, much of what he had budgeted for was to maintain current levels. He said that they would likely need to request additional funds at the end of the year to cover the increased costs and they were not funded last year.

Ms. Evans asked how much postage funding Mr. Sienkowski had asked for and how much was allocated.

Mr. Sienkowski said that the expected increase in postage was $18,000. He said that the actual budget for FY26 was $239,585. He said that he would like to bring to the Board's attention another point to consider. He said that although he did not think this would be an issue, it had become one. He said that last year, they had seen an increase in delinquencies, probably due to the extension offered during the government shutdown, which resulted in an additional 10,000 delinquent notices being sent out. He said that this was likely caused by uncertainty surrounding the due dates of bills and other payments.

Mr. Sienkowski said that moving forward, he would like to discuss the specific position requests. He said that the first one was for an analyst position, which would provide technical support and assistance with their reporting to strengthen their operations, improve efficiencies, and reduce risk within the organization. He said that one key benefit of this was improving financial efficiency. He said that currently, they were working with finance to transition to ACH and virtual card payments for their vendors, which reduced check issuance, mail-related losses, and the need for manual processing of payments. He said that this would enhance their reconciliation research capabilities as they modernized their payment methods. He said that another key benefit was the ability to establish stronger internal controls and mitigate risk. He said that this position would provide backup coverage for critical functions, including tax bill preparation, which was currently handled by a single employee.

Mr. Sienkowski said that having this position would reduce their operational risk and ensure continuity during peak periods or when staff was absent. He said that additionally, this position would enhance revenue protection by monitoring and following up on return payments from departments, ensuring timely repayments, and protecting County revenues. He said that for example, if someone issued a payment for a permit and it bounced, this position would follow up and ensure that the payment was collected. He said that currently, they had no one to hold people accountable for this issue. He said that this position would also provide support for complex tax administration, particularly for Fire and Emergency Services tax billing, which had been a difficulty for them during tax season. He said that they had been doing manual labor to get those bills right due to the fire tax.

Ms. Vanuch said that she would like to quickly address the item he mentioned previously regarding a bad payment and the permit process. She asked if they could consider revising the policy so that the last payment was paid in cash or by credit card, was verified as processed, rather than relying on a check. She said that even grocery stores no longer accepted checks.

Mr. Sienkowski said that he thought it was a great idea. He said that he believed Permitting and Planning and Zoning would have to be involved in that change.

Mr. English said that he agreed with Ms. Vanuch that they should work with Planning and Zoning to rectify that issue with payments for permits. He said that they should not give out permits until the check cleared.

Dr. Yeung said that she recalled a conversation she had with Mr. Sienkowski about working on automation and systems modernization to improve the Treasurer Office processes and revenue collection cycle. She said that increasing efficiency and reducing redundancy was important to achieve before funding an additional position.

Mr. Sienkowski said that they had revamped the whole collection process. He said that part of the requested position would assist in implementation of that. He said that they had a lot of ideas in the pipeline, but getting them implemented required additional staff.

Dr. Yeung said that she noticed in one of the slides that it mentioned the time it takes to complete a case. She said that based on this, she inferred that they had a significant amount of manual work involved. She said that she would appreciate it if Mr. Sienkowski could share the original process and the changes they made to improve it.

Mr. Sienkowski said that he could follow up with that information at a later date. He said the last benefit he would like to highlight with this new position was an increase in in-house technical capacity. He said that this would enable them to address system issues and implement software upgrades. He said that as they were all aware, external vendor support had declined significantly since the COVID-19 pandemic. He said that this would help minimize downtime and ensure consistent service delivery across all departments.

Ms. Evans asked what the age was of their software.

Mr. Sienkowski said that they initially designed and built it back in the 1990s, but it had undergone a few upgrades over time. He said that it was one of the most complete and comprehensive softwares available.

Ms. Evans asked how they were moving towards their 2040 Comprehensive Plan goals while still utilizing 1990s technology. She said that she understood Mr. Sienkowski was not in this position back then, but something had to have occurred back then that led to this software being created.

Mr. Sienkowski said that they partnered with an upstart technology company to build what they wanted from scratch, and now that company markets and sells that solution to other localities, including Loudoun County and others. He said that that company had implemented updates over time, including the addition of different modules to help streamline processes, such as collections on tax returns.

Ms. Evans asked how often they updated the software with new modules. She asked if Stafford was tracking those updates.

Mr. Sienkowski said that it had likely been approximately 10 years since they underwent a full overhaul and update to the software.

Mr. Diggs said that the Board had been presented with the proposed budget, and he understood that none of the requested positions were allocated. He asked what Mr. Sienkowski's office had received this year from his initial request.

Mr. Sienkowski said that contract renewals had been approved. He said that other increased costs from online payments and postal increases were not funded and his entire office supplies budget was cut.

Donna Krauss, Deputy County Administrator, said that there was a 2% reduction on every department budget, so it was up to every department to decide where to make those cuts. She said that it depended on how each department head wanted to handle those cuts.

Mr. Diggs said that he did worry about redundancy in terms of when one person may be out sick or left their position, there would be no one to backfill that role. He said that it sounded like it was a critical position in that sense, and he thought they would probably keep hearing that throughout this meeting.

Mr. Ashton said that yes, he believed every department would make that point with various roles. He said that when his staff prioritized all the positions in the requests from departments, almost all of the 81 unfunded positions had that theme. He said that they were strained in many areas of the organization.

Ms. Guy asked if they had tangible information about what the cost of not filling those positions would be. She said that some of those positions were crucial to making the County's processes efficient and accurate, so there must be a long-term cost associated with keeping County departments understaffed and underfunded.

Mr. Ashton said that they did not have hard costs associated with that, but they did have an understanding of the risks involved in not filling those positions. He said that in some cases, they could potentially derive real costs in terms of how additional positions would decrease overtime utilization in their Sheriff and Fire and Rescue departments, but in other departments it was more qualitative in terms of the risks associated with understaffing.

Ms. Krauss said that when departments presented their budget requests, they required each department to provide metrics on what that position would accomplish. She said that for example, if they were considering a widget maker, they needed to know how many widgets that individual would produce, the cost of their training, and any special certifications they may need. She said that having these tangible metrics helped them understand the value of that position and what they might be losing without that position.

Dr. Yeung said that she wanted to reiterate her request to get information on the Treasurer's current process and improvements made. She said that they had a very robust Information Technology (IT) Department and experienced staff that could help them make more progress towards automating their systems. She said that they needed to make sure they had the technology to connect and update their systems first.

Mr. Sienkowski said that he would provide Dr. Yeung with the requested information. He said that he would like to briefly review some of the additional benefits of the requested position. He said that this position would provide transparency and assist with reporting and obtaining the right data for individuals when they requested it. He said that he believed this was an important aspect of the position, as it aligned with the Board's priorities for excellence in government and transformational leadership, as well as partnerships for education and wellness opportunities.

Mr. Sienkowski said that the second request involved converting a part-time position to full-time. He said that currently, this individual handled front-line duties, including Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) transactions, cash payments, and customer service at the front counter.

He said that the expanded need arose from the County's ongoing issue with liens. He said that to address this, they required someone to conduct research when a lien letter was received. He said that this person would need to track down the employer's information and follow up accordingly. He said that this expanded role would involve making phone calls and sending emails to employers to determine the best course of action. He said that they also needed to identify a designated Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Officer within the office to strengthen transparency and reinforce the County's commitment to open government.

Mr. Diggs asked if there was potential for shared services to support that request.

Mr. Sienkowski said that as a constitutional officer, he had the responsibility to implement this on his own. He said that this would provide the necessary capacity to train and maintain backup supervisors to assist during high-volume times and peak periods. He said that one key benefit to the County included improved service delivery, as the new position would provide an additional window for the public to conduct transactions. He said that it would also strengthen compliance and accountability through timely handling of enforcement-related accounts,and improved Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) responses. He said that the position would provide operational resilience and and positively impact employee retention and workforce development. He said that this position also aligned with the Board's priorities of excellence in government and transformational leadership.

Mr. Sienkowski said that the question on everyone's mind was how to fund this. He said that the analyst position was approximately $125,000, and the specialist position was a conversion, costing around $37,000. He said that they were currently working with County Finance to implement a virtual card and ACH program, which was expected to generate an annual rebate of $319,000. He said that one known acceptor of virtual card could generate an annual rebate of $151,000. He said that currently, they could pay this vendor at any time, as long as their Finance Department was comfortable with the reconciliation process on the back end. He said that if the Finance Department provided a memo, he could send them the money and get the rebate as soon as tomorrow.

Mr. Sienkowski said that after they had completed implementing this with the County, they planned to implement it with the Schools. He said that he did not know the exact impact it would have, as they had already converted many of their vendors to P-cards, which had already earned them a rebate. He said that another proposal, which he had discussed with the Utilities Department, was to increase the return check fee to align with neighboring localities, which would be $50; currently, it was $35. He said that based off of last year's numbers, this would generate an additional $47,000 for the General Fund and $11,000 for Utilities. He said that given the Board's interest in expanding the County's tax base, once they worked through the new implemented restrictions regarding wage liens, his goal was to help the Board achieve that goal.

Mr. Sienkowski said that there was a need for collection for ambulance billing and red light and speed camera tickets. He said that they already started expanding their collection efforts, including court collections for Juvenile and Domestic Relations (JDR) court cases. He said that as he had mentioned earlier, they were also working on virtual cards with the County and planned to implement payment plans for delinquent taxpayers. He said that this program required a person-intensive approach, as it involved regular contact with taxpayers to ensure they stayed on track with their payments.

Ms. Evans asked if the County was receiving a portion of the fee processing they performed for the JDR courts.

Mr. Sienkowski said that probably not, because the amounts being collected were not substantial at this point. He said that the actual fines went to the state and a portion came to the County, but it only offset the costs of the program.

Ms. Allen said that the reason the Board decided not to fund these things was not because they did not want to or did not have the opportunity; it was because of austerity. She said that she understood these positions could be revenue-generating, so she would like to know more about how they could be self-funding within the Treasurer's Office budget until the County could absorb the cost and free up that money within the department.

Mr. Sienkowski said that he would not recommend that approach at this point because they did not know exactly how much they would collect. He said that if interest rates dropped, then rebates could drop, too.

Ms. Allen said that she was looking at the anticipated rebate values presented and was wondering why that revenue could not be used to fund the requested positions.

Mr. Sienkowski said that the position requests were supposed to be presented to the Board for them to make the decisions, as part of the budget process. He said that the rebate funds were intended to be part of their revenues, which were then dispersed through the decisions the Board made in the appropriations process.

Ms. Allen asked what the timeline would be for implementing that virtual card provider.

Mr. Sienkowski said that he could do it as soon as possible; they could start earning the rebate tomorrow.

Ms. Allen asked why they had waited to do that.

Mr. Sienkowski said that the Finance Department was trying to get the entire program up and running before implementing parts of it.

Ms. Allen asked if it could be phased in.

Mr. Sienkowski said that he thought it could be, but there was a resource shortage there as well.

Ms. Allen said that she was frustrated to hear that they had opportunties to make money, but as she heard more details, there were shortfalls and roadblocks that prevented it from happening. She asked if there was something they could examine during this budget cycle to get creative in how they brought someone on board or create a position. She said that she wanted to know more about what that would entail.

Ms. Light said that yes, they could do that. She said that these revenues could be added to the budget as a source of funding for the Board's priorities. She said that this program sounded like it would create efficiencies within the Treasurer's Office and Finance Department. She said that her question was whether these would be positions that would generate revenue, or if they were positions that would be supported through this revenue.

Ms. Allen asked if Ms. Light could parse those two differences out when she submitted that information.

Ms. Vanuch said that regarding ambulance billing, she recalled when they converted a Fire and Rescue position to do the ambulance billings. She asked if they were not doing that anymore and that Mr. Sienkowski would need to do it.

Mr. Sienkowski said that he had been made aware of a need for support regarding ambulance billing, although he was not entirely familiar with the nuances of the issue. He said that it had been made clear that it was a need.

Ms. Vanuch asked where Mr. Sienkowski had heard that information.

Mr. Sienkowski said that he had received that information from Ms. Light.

Ms. Light said that she would be very interested in getting that specific information during this budget process. She said that they would need to review the revenues that was supposed to offset and whether it reached what it was supposed to. She said that she would also like to know whether the County or the Treasurer's Office was better suited to fulfilling that need for the Fire and Rescue Department.

Ms. Light said that to answer many of the questions, the current ambulance billing process was governed by a County Ordinance, which prohibited them from collecting on outstanding balances. She said that if the Board wished to explore the possibility of collections, they would need to review the County Ordinance. She said that for residents within the County, the County accepted whatever insurance paid for ambulance services, and that was the extent of their involvement.

Ms. Light said that for individuals from outside the County, if they sent a bill and the insurance only covered $100 of the $500, they had no means of collecting the remaining balance. She said that in discussions with the Treasurer's Office, their office possessed the best expertise in collections. She said that therefore, it made sense to have this process handled within the Treasurer's Office, rather than within Fire and Rescue.

Ms. Vanuch said that she recalled a discussion from a public safety work session during which they had previously discussed this topic because they were trying to explore an alternative way to obtain additional funding from the state for the calls they responded to on I-95 from a Fire and Rescue perspective. She said that unfortunately, they only received minimal funding from the state on this matter, even though it significantly impacted their resources, particularly Engine 9 and Engine 2, who were always on standby for I-95 calls. She said that they saw this as an opportunity to offset some of the costs from outside the County. She asked if the Board agreed that they were missing out on that revenue and needed to prioritize updating the Ordinance.

Ms. Allen said that she recalled from that conversation that it would not generate enough revenue to cover the costs of collection, so it would cost them money. She said that the situation may be different now that they had a higher population in the County, but four or five years ago she recalled the Fire and Rescue Department stating that it would not be cost-effective to collect. She said that if Mr. Sienkowski and staff were confident that the Treasurer's Office could generate revenue, it was a different conversation.

Ms. Vanuch said that she would like to add to the Board's work list to work on that Ordinance.

Mr. English asked if outsourcing it would be more cost-effective.

Mr. Ashton said that to move forward, he suggested that they schedule a meeting with the Fire Chief to establish a baseline of their current operations and practices. He said that they should gather data on the current volumes being generated and use that information to determine whether they needed to make internal adjustments or consider outsourcing. He said that by doing so, they could identify their pathway forward and bring their findings back to the Board for further discussion. He said that he believed that getting that baseline was essential, as he had been hearing various comments and concerns at this stage.

Ms. Vanuch said that she believed it would be beneficial to include this topic on the agenda and address it during the budget process, as it could significantly impact revenues and costs.

Mr. Sienkowski said that he wanted to bring up one other item that was far on the horizon, which was single billing for personal property bills. He said that currently, they were spending a considerable amount of time due to the fact that they had two sets of personal property bills. He said that they were sending out an additional 138,000 bills each year. He said that if they were to consolidate these into a single mailing, like many localities did, it would result in significant savings. He said that he was aware that the Commissioner's staff was often under time pressure to process business filings, as they needed to meet the May 5 deadline.

Mr. Sienkowski said that if they were to delay sending personal property bills until September, it would reduce the amount of overtime required for them. He said that this was not an immediate need, and it may not be feasible this year because it would create a one-time budget shortfall. He said that he acknowledged this was not the year for that item, but he was simply bringing this idea to the Board's attention, as he had been considering it for many years and believed it was worth figuring out.

Mr. Sienkowski said that in conclusion, the proposed addition of these positions represented a strategic and coordinated investment in the County's capacity, financial integrity, and public service delivery. He said that this investment strengthened internal controls, ensured continuity of operations, enhanced transparency, and supported compliance. He said that the new positions directly addressed the growing demands in revenue collection, payment modernization, public record compliance, customer service, and public safety enforcement. He said that by reducing organizational risk through redundancy for critical functions and expanding in-house expertise, these additions would provide a more robust framework for the County's operations. He said that by approving these positions, the County would position itself to better serve its residents as the community continued to grow.

Mr. English asked for more information on the $57,000 associated with DMV operations.

Mr. Sienkowski said that each year, they were allocated a certain amount of money, which was essentially earmarked by law for DMV operations, specifically DMV Select. He said that the County received 20% of the revenues, while the remaining 80% was allocated specifically to his department for discretionary use. He said that he used a lot of it to do renovations recently.

Mr. English asked what kinds of fees the Treasurer's Office had.

Mr. Sienkowski said that they had DMV stop fees, which included a $25 administrative fee in addition to the stop fee. He said that there were also credit card fees of 2.95% and 2% if payments were made in person. He said that they absorbed debit card fees and online e-check fees, which amounted to 30 cents per transaction. He said that they also absorbed meal taxes, which were $1 per transaction. He said that these expenses were part of their operational or administrative costs. He said that the volume of transactions had increased exponentially due to the shift to online services, and they were not fully prepared for this surge.

Mr. English asked why they absorbed it and why they could not just put it back on the payer.

Mr. Sienkowski said that it was certainly an option.

Ms. Vanuch asked what the total amount of fees was.

Mr. Sienkowski said that he had that information but would need to look it up.

Mr. Diggs asked if it would cost more to switch from absorbing the fees.

Mr. Sienkowski said no; it should not be difficult at all.

Dr. Yeung said that she would reiterate her earlier point. She said that from her perspective as one Board member, she thought there was a significant amount of automation and work that needed to be done within the department to identify efficiencies. She said she thought it was essential to examine the various revenues and departments that contributed to the Office's income. She asked if Ms. Krauss had any ideas on how to streamline their collection processes throughout the County.

Ms. Krauss said that specifically in Development Services and with permitting, there were significant issues with checks. She said that staff wanted to meet with Mr. Sienkowski to discuss potential efficiencies there, but not every department had that same issue.

Mr. Sienkowski said that Mr. Santay had reached out to him about potentially finding some sort of online payment system.

Ms. Krauss said that she believed they needed to consider having a more comprehensive conversation with the Treasurer and discuss how they could approach this in a more holistic manner, incorporating input from various departments to ensure it aligned with the County's overall goals. She said that however, this may involve some costs. She said that when discussing technology upgrades and modernization, this was a reality. She said that for example, the

County's financial system was 35 years old. She said that there were some infrastructure challenges that had now gained momentum and was spreading, so the Board really needed to consider it if they were going to make an investment in initiatives like these. She said that staff would be happy to review and prioritize them, but the Board had specific priorities and they would need more money to do these kinds of things.

Ms. Allen said that she agreed with Dr. Yeung that there was a central theme within their budget process, which was that they must consider how to get automated and become more efficient so they did not continue to have the same challenges. She said that she would like to see the costs associated with a County-wide upgrade of their systems and identify opportunities to implement artificial intelligence. She said that she would support hiring a consultant to provide that input to the Board so they could be well-informed for making those decisions in future years.

ITEM 2. COMMONWEALTH ATTORNEY, ERIC OLSEN, BUDGET PRESENTATION

Eric Olsen, Commonwealth Attorney, stated that he would be talking about his office's budget and budget request. He said that he would like to start by laying the groundwork with a couple of comments. He said that he appreciated presenting this information prior to the Sheriff's presentation, as it was a tough act to follow. He said that he thought it was appropriate that they were presenting consecutively, as everyone understood the priority associated with public safety in the Sheriff's Office. He said that however, what was often overlooked was that the Commonwealth Attorney's Office, which was also an important component of public safety. He said that there were many cases where the Commonwealth Attorney's role directly affected whether people lived or died. He said that for example, in drunk driving cases, his office was not funded by the state to prosecute these cases, but they were able to do so with the support of the County.

Mr. Olsen said that as a constitutional officer, the state mandated which cases to prosecute; if the state did not mandate it, the state did not fund it. He said that this meant his office did not receive funding for misdemeanor cases, which comprised a substantial portion of their caseload. He said that the County citizens and the Sheriff's Office would not want any other option than for the Commonwealth Attorney to prosecute those cases. He said that the people who killed innocents on the road were often recidivist drunk drivers with high blood alcohol content (BAC). He said that they could recognize these individuals before they caused a fatal accident if they did their job correctly. He said that the Sheriff's Office made the arrest, and his office prosecuted vigorously. He said that they strived to be fair and balanced, but when it came to driving while intoxicated (DWI) cases, they made sure to be experienced and knowledgeable enough to take the case all the way to conviction. He said that this process was crucial, as the conviction created the deterrent effect that prevented individuals from committing similar crimes in the future.

Mr. Olsen said that in their society, there was a lot of alcohol and people had to drive everywhere, so it was very easy for people to make that poor decision. He said that what he had found was that, even if an individual had made this decision multiple times in the past, they were more likely to never drink and drive again after being charged and successfully prosecuted. He said that this was due to the deterrent effect of the conviction, which included education, fines, license suspension, and ignition interlock. He said that this deterrent was not only due to the successful arrest but because of the successful prosection. He said that the Commonwealth

Attorney's Office was able to achieve this success because of their expertise, and they were able to do so because of the support the County provided to their office. He said that there was a previous question regarding the cost to Mr. Sienkowski about not providing one of his requested positions. He said that the cost of not providing sufficient support to the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office was a substantial cost, one that affected lives and public safety. He said that he wanted to emphasize this public safety aspect as they discussed this budget.

Mr. Olsen said that the Freelance Star published a cartoon in 1993, which featured the Scales of Justice, with Stafford on one side and "the Caseload" on the other, weighing it down. He said that this was the state of affairs in 1993, but he would note it was different now -- it was even worse than in 1993. He said that the success with the Sheriff's Office and the prosecution process had led to an overwhelming caseload. He said that as a result, he was here tonight to request additional positions to support their mission. He said that first, he would begin by discussing their requested paralegal position. He said that staff had asked them to break down the impact of this position in terms of the support it would provide. He said that they had analyzed their current staff and paralegals, and with 2,125 cases per paralegal, one paralegal would reduce that to 1,889, which was substantial.

Mr. Olsen said that next, he would discuss the Assistant Commonwealth Attorney position. He said that in 2023, the state had conducted a staffing standards study for Commonwealth Attorneys across the state, which had recommended in 2023 that Stafford should have 23 attorneys to prosecute felony and misdemeanor cases. He said that at the time, they had 15, and now they had 18, still short of the needed 23. He said that the County had recognized this two years ago and had funded a County-funded position. He said that the Comp Board also upped two positions, which the County supplemented and funded, setting aside the County-funded position. He said that the need for that position remained, despite it being set aside at the time.

Mr. Olsen said that in terms of the staffing process, it included both the County-funded positions and the positions funded by the Comp Board. He said that currently, there were only three County-funded positions, two of which had been established due to the implementation of body-worn cameras. He said that he wanted to emphasize the benefits of body-worn cameras, which included reducing complaints against law enforcement officers, lawsuits, and ensuring clarity about events. He said that these cameras had been a game-changer for law enforcement and were widely supported by both law enforcement and citizens. He said that the problem was a budgetary issue that had a significant impact on the criminal justice system. He said that one DWI case could generate a substantial amount of body-worn camera footage, with three officers involved, each wearing a camera.

Mr. Olsen said that in his experience, starting in 1989, a case had consisted of a thick case file and possibly one Polaroid photograph. He said that now, it was a mountain of digital data, including body-worn camera footage. He said that the Virginia State Bar emphasized that prosecutors must review body-worn camera footage to fulfill their ethical duties. He said that simply relying on police reports was insufficient. He said that with thousands of hours of body-worn camera footage, the impact on the prosecution was substantial.

Mr. Olsen said that this was why the General Assembly had mandated, eight years ago, that for every 75 body-worn cameras, the County must provide a prosecutor to the Commonwealth

Attorney's office. He said that therefore, the County funded two positions mandated by body-worn cameras, and the final position was a grant-funded position for domestic violence and sexual assault prosecutions. He said that the County only covered a portion of the position, leaving the rest to be covered by the grant. He said that the County had initially authorized a position in response to their clear understaffing, and although the state had provided funding for two attorneys, it did not negate the need for another County-funded attorney position. He said that he requested the Board to prioritize this and provide a County-funded attorney position that had been previously allocated but set aside when the Compensation Board added those two positions.

Ms. Evans asked if the new position would be a CA-1, CA-2, or CA-3 level position.

Mr. Olsen said that it would be a CA-1 position.

Ms. Evans said that it was an entry-level position in that case. She asked if the paralegal position would be Comp Board-funded or not. She asked if Mr. Olsen was asking the County to fully fund all three of the requested positions.

Mr. Olsen said that that was correct. He said that there were no slots open with the Comp Board and they were asking the County to fully fund those three positions.

Dr. Yeung asked if Mr. Olsen had further information to present.

Mr. Olsen said that yes, he would review the rest of the information. He said that in addition to the paralegal, they were requesting a legal assistant, which was a step down from a paralegal. He said that currently, they had three legal assistants handling their caseload. He said that they were seeking another legal assistant to help distribute the workload. He said that the breakdown of case assignments was included for reference. He said that the increase in staffing they received from the Comp Board had led to a request for an additional $3,000 for seminars and conferences. He said that the state required a minimum of so many hours of continuing legal education; however, he set a higher standard for his attorneys, and he took pride in having one of the best Commonwealth Attorney's Offices in the Commonwealth. He said that this was due in part to their ability to keep their attorneys for a long time, which was due to how they treated them and ensured they were well-prepared for court.

Mr. Olsen said that they also recently learned from the IT Department that their server would be full within six months. He said that IT estimated the cost of new drives for the server would be around $12,000. He said that this was essential because all of their important files, evidence, case management system, and other assets relied on that server.

Mr. Diggs asked if this $12,000 was included in the County Administrator's proposed budget.

Ms. Light said no. She said that the IT Department had worked to provide a virtual server, so the cost was not necessary.

Ms. Guy said that the presentation noted they could not transfer files over 15 gigabytes. She asked for confirmation that they could still transfer them now, and that would only be an issue once the server was full.

Mr. Olsen said that yes, they were currently able to complete their necessary tasks.

George Elsasser said that they had been working with IT, and the hoe was to implement a virtual server approach to get more mileage out of their existing systems. He said that however, IT had informed their office's IT representative that this approach was not going to work. He said that they were having a lot of internal file transfers that had issues when multiple media types and systems were being accessed.

Ms. Vanuch said that she would support bringing this item forward now. She said that this sounded like failure of critical public safety infrastructure as opposed to a typical budget item. She said that the Board could use one-time funds, even in their current budget, to resolve this issue. She said that this was why they wanted to hear from their constitutional officers. She said that she would ask the Board to consider directing their staff to find the funds to upgrade the drives for the Commonwealth Attorney's servers. She said that she did not want to risk the virtual server failing or wait six months to deal with this issue. She asked Mr. Ashton what the process would be to find a solution to this issue.

Mr. Ashton said that he would talk to IT and to the Finance Department to see where they could move $12,000 from. He said that they would determine whether or not they would have to bring it back to the Board for approval, but staff could work on it.

Dr. Yeung asked what files were taking up the most storage and whether the length of time they kept the files was mandated.

Mr. Olsen said that in terms of their retention policy, misdemeanors were retained for one year, serious felonies were retained for three years, and major cases were retained indefinitely.

Dr. Yeung asked if they had been continuously moving files off the server when they were no longer needed.

Mr. Olsen said that yes, as soon as they reached the deadline for retention, they removed the electronic versions.

Dr. Yeung said that from an IT perspective, the County IT Department should be able to upgrade the server automatically when it was needed, rather than the Commonwealth Attorney IT Department operating in a separate silo from the County's IT.

Mr. Elsasser said that he agreed. He said that IT ran their servers and the Commonwealth Attorney interfaced with them, so there was a lot of communication and anticipatory actions.

Dr. Yeung said that the County IT Department should be notifying the Board of these kinds of issues.

Mr. Ashton said that the County was committed to doing this, but they needed to know the Commonwealth Attorney's vendor was prepared to do what was needed on their side.

Mr. Elsasser said that yes, they were.

Mr. Ashton asked them to make sure that was happening on their side.

Mr. Olsen said yes.

Ms. Krauss said that to clarify, County staff had in fact been working with the Commonwealth Attorney's Office on this. She said that they had been communicating and were not waiting to bring this to the Board. She said that County staff had already agreed to do what was necessary and were working with the Commonwealth Attorney's vendor to get it done.

Ms. Evans said that she understood the heavy load of body-worn camera footage and how much space the videos could take up. She asked if the Commonwealth Attorney's Office had proactively notified the County that their server could not handle the amount of footage and that they needed help.

Mr. Elsasser said that they did, and they upgraded their servers with the help of the County, which was a combined effort. He said that at the time, IT handled all their work, as their office did not yet have an IT rep. He said that he put they best heads together and tried to determine the appropriate server size. He said that the server they got was very large, but they had failed to anticipate the incredible volume of data they ended up processing since that time.

Ms. Evans asked if they would be moving their server to the County IT Department.

Mr. Elsasser said that the County had servers dedicated to providing the Commonwealth Attorney's service. He said that there were just unanticipated aspects that culminated into an overwhelming amount of data.

Ms. Evans asked Mr. Ashton if the Commonwealth Attorney Office still needed the $12,000 if it was under the County's IT Department.

Mr. Ashton said that the County was prepared to absorb the cost, so the request was being met. He said that at this stage, they had to work out some issues with the vendor, but otherwise were ready to move forward.

Ms. Evans asked if their case management system was PBK or some other software.

Mr. Elsasser said that they used Software Unlimited.

Mr. Olsen said that a prosecutor's office cannot function without a case management system. He said that the state did not provide funding for a case management system to the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office. He said that this was another expense that must be included in their budget, supported by the County. He said that the County had done what they needed, and they had a very good case management system. He said that however, there were 120 Commonwealth's Attorney's Offices across the state, each using one of 18 different case management systems that did not really integrate with one another. He said that this was a ridiculous system, created by the fact that prosecutors were constitutional officers with a unique funding scheme that differed from most states, where counties and cities were typically responsible for funding prosecutors, or the state was wholly responsible.

Ms. Evans said that also related to the case management system, she would like to know if there was funding for technology in the Capital Improvement Program (CIP).

Mr. Krauss said that it had not been requested.

Ms. Evans asked if the Commonwealth Attorney would support putting that into the CIP in order to fund future upgrades to their systems.

Mr. Elsasser said that without being aware of all the details, it logically would be the desired approach. He said that currently, they were fully supported by the County in terms of paying subscription costs and upgrades as they came to be.

Mr. Olsen said that there were budget line items for those costs, and they fell under the Commonwealth Attorney's budget, not the County's budget. He said that the current situation was that the County funded this budget for certain IT needs.

Ms. Evans said that she understood that, but was just wondering why it was not in the CIP.

Mr. Olsen said that he did not know the reason why it was not done that way, but if the question was whether that was something the Commonwealth Attorney's Office would be willing to work out with the County, his answer would be yes.

Andrew Spence, Chief Information Officer, said that to clarify Ms. Evans' question, he wanted to be careful. He said that while he appreciated the Commonwealth Attorney's perspective, they may not request funding through the CIP because case management systems were transitioning to a software as a service (SAAS) product. He said that as a result, it was not considered an asset that could be funded through the CIP process; instead, it was an ongoing cost. He said that this was a challenge when it came to adopting new technology. He said that they had been working closely with the Commonwealth Attorney's tech expert, for some time now. He said that they would address the virtual server situation as soon as possible and they had been making great progress so far.

Ms. Allen asked when they would get to the point where they had a general IT Department for the County and reduce the silos in their IT processes. She said that they could then assign staff to focus on individual departments within the general County IT Department. She asked if this would be possible.

Ms. Krauss said that they already had a general IT Department, which also provided IT support in larger departments, such as Fire, to manage those systems. She said that she believed that they had created the Commonwealth Attorney IT position approximately two years ago to specifically address the body warm camera challenge. She said that this involved organizing and preparing the extensive footage collected by the IT staff, which was essential for court proceedings.

Ms. Allen asked if that staff member was technically part of the Commonwealth Attorney Office or in the County staff.

Ms. Krauss said that they were in the Commonwealth Attorney's Office. She said that when they created the job description, they were trying to determine that they needed an IT person, but also someone who understood prosecution and court processes, as well as how to present data in court, because they played a crucial role in helping prosecutors present their cases, including showing footage. She said that it was a different situation from general IT services.

Mr. Olsen said that to add to that, his office's IT person must be accountable to him. He said that for criminal justice purposes, that role must be within his department.

Mr. Ashton said that as someone with 20 years of experience in IT, he saw this as a standard approach to doing business. He said that the reasons for this were numerous, but the primary one was that the information did not belong to the centralized IT Department. He said that the custodian of that information was the Commonwealth Attorney, so they needed to have the level of interface in his department that could report to him as well as interface with the County. He said that on the County side, they were focusing on the technology, while the Commonwealth Attorney was focusing on the information. He said that this was not a new type of delineation.

Ms. Allen said that with regard to the case load the Commonwealth Attorney handled, she would like to know how the cases per person compared to other peer jurisdictions.

Mr. Olsen said that the staffing standards study conducted at the behest of the General Assembly analyzed the staffing standard needs for every single County and City, all 120 of them. He said that he had a copy of that report, which he could provide to the Board if needed. He said that the study also outlined the authorized and paid positions within the Commonwealth, as well as unfunded positions, and those that were not part of the Comp Board. He said that the report broke down the number of positions required to execute the duties for each jurisdiction, providing a comprehensive overview for every single jurisdiction in the Commonwealth.

Ms. Allen asked if that report could be provided to the Board.

Mr. Olsen said that they had previously provided that information, and he was happy to provide it again.

Mr. Elsasser said that the way certain jurisdictions managed their manpower strains was by not prosecuting misdemeanor cases. He said that it had always been the tradition, as Mr. Olson had mentioned earlier in his presentation, that they prosecuted misdemeanor cases. He said that these included DUIs, assault and batteries, larcenies, and other similar offenses. He said that by not prosecuting these cases, it alleviated the strain on staff.

Ms. Allen asked if they could get information on Spotsylvania's staffing levels.

Mr. Olsen said yes. He said that the staffing standards were all outlined in 2023, and the General Assembly authorized additional Comp Board positions, two of which were funded last year. He said that the 2023 Staffing Standards study detailed the information for every jurisdiction in terms of what was there currently and what was needed.

Mr. Diggs said that he wanted to note that this was the first instance where the Board had gone through the budgets with their constitutional officers. He said that the Board was seeing this information for the first time, but the departments and staff had already worked through it. He said that he wanted to emphasize that County staff and the Commonwealth Attorney's Office was currently working through the issue with their server capacity.

Mr. Olsen said that he had included that in his budget because it was an upcoming cost that they were anticipating this year. He said that it did not mean it was a problem they could not solve; this was simply his chance to present to the Board what was different in his budget this year compared to other years. He said that he apologized if he misrepresented the situation.

Ms. Vanuch said that she appreciated the information being presented to the Board in this format so they could all be aware. She said that she would appreciate it if the Board could be updated when they did find a solution for their server.

Mr. Olsen said that he had nothing further to present, but he did want to say that they had a great County and they all worked very well together. He said that this Board had always been very supportive of his office and public safety, and the citizens of Stafford County benefited from that. He said that they would continue to work together and he hoped the Board would let him know if they needed anything further from his office.

ITEM 3. SHERIFF, DAVE DECATUR, BUDGET PRESENTATION

David Decatur, Sheriff, said that he appreciated the opportunity to meet with the Board this evening. He said that he wanted to acknowledge the incredible partnership they had with the Board and the County leadership team. He said that their close collaboration with Stafford County government, the Budget office, and the County Administrator had been instrumental in their success. He said that today, he would like to bring a couple of issues to the Board's attention. He said that he would be sharing some challenges facing the Sheriff's Office and how they compared to other law enforcement agencies in their area, taking into account their comparative jurisdictions when they established their public safety pay scale.

Sheriff Decatur said that the Stafford County Sheriff's Office was the only full-service law enforcement agency in Stafford County. He said that this meant that every emergency, crisis, or call requiring law enforcement or public safety response ultimately went through the Sheriff's Office. He said that they operated with eight divisions and had 351 positions, although not all were filled. He said that 257 of those were sworn positions. He said that while they did have the Virginia State Police, who primarily assisted them with traffic crash investigations, there was no other backup for the Sheriff's Office. He said that maintaining a safe community and County was a top priority for their department. He said that for many years, they had delivered a high level of public safety, both efficiently and effectively, with strong community trust.

Sheriff Decatur said that one metric that stood out was their crime rate, which had remained flat despite the County's growing population. He said that this achievement required significant effort and was influenced by various factors. He said that their Emergency Communications Center (ECC) handled tens of thousands of calls each year, and their investigators were highly skilled, achieving a high clearance rate and tenacious drive to solve crimes. He said that they also had a strong partnership with the community. He said that notably, deputies were increasingly taking on more responsibilities with fewer resources, which was not a reflection of the Board or County, as they had received substantial support over the years from the County and the Board of Supervisors. He said that however, these expanding responsibilities continued to grow, and a significant portion of that came from the state of Virginia. He said that the workload had grown beyond the traditional law enforcement services they provided.

Sheriff Decatur said that he would like to highlight a couple of specific examples that illustrated this point. He said that one example that came to mind was the short notice they received from the hospital in Stafford County, approximately two years ago. He said that they informed them that they could no longer perform blood draws, and gave them a 30-day deadline to find a solution. He said that their deputies had to be creative and innovative, and they ended up establishing a phlebotomy program within their department. He said that this required them to train their deputies to perform blood draws, acquire medical-grade equipment, develop procedures, and ultimately they were able to successfully implement this program. He said that in all his time as a deputy, he truly could not have imagined officers would need to perform blood draws, but they rose to the challenge.

Sheriff Decatur said that another challenge in his department was mental health. He said that as law enforcement officers, they were often the first point of contact for individuals in crisis, and their jails had become de facto mental health facilities. He said that while there had been significant progress in addressing this issue, including additional deputies to staff a mental health unit and a mental health clinician to co-respond to mental health calls, there was still much work to be done to alleviate the pressure on deputies. He said that their deputies had shown remarkable resilience and dedication in responding to these emotionally demanding and time-intensive situations.

Sheriff Decatur said that their deputies also faced challenges in traffic safety, and they worked tirelessly to keep the community safe. He said that a few years ago, they had experienced a spike in their fatality rate, but they had worked diligently through education, awareness, and prevention efforts within their traffic safety programs, and enforcement was just a small part of that. He said that they had been able to drive down their fatality rates, but it was essential to continue working hard to stay on top of this issue. He said that protecting their schools was also a top priority, and they had made significant strides in this area. He said that currently, they had five high schools and eight middle schools with a School Resource Officer (SRO) assigned to each.

Sheriff Decatur said that they had 17 elementary schools, although not all of them currently had a deputy assigned. He said that to address this, they had created the School Protection Officer program, which had been initially proposed to the General Assembly several years ago and ultimately vetoed by the Governor. He said that regardless, they had been able to do things through this program that were creatively attract new officers, and while it remained a challenge, it also remained a priority for them.

Dr. Yeung asked how many SROs they currently had.

Sheriff Decatur said that they had 14 positions for the 17 elementary schools and 10 of them were vacant. He said that they had an additional 12 people currently in the academy.

Dr. Yeung asked if 10 positions were currently unfilled.

Sheriff Decatur said that yes, 10 were unfilled.

Dr. Yeung said that the Schools decided to fill the positions with security officers because they wanted to meet the need. She said that she was wondering why those 10 positions had not been filled for multiple years.

Sheriff Decatur said that he believed they currently had 14 School Protection Officer positions for elementary schools, with four of those positions currently filled. He said that in the state of Virginia, there were two options for filling these positions: hiring an SRO, which was an armed and certified deputy, or hiring an armed security person who would be trained through the Sheriff's Office. He said that he had previously suggested exploring the latter option, particularly if they struggled to fill the vacant positions or find qualified candidates. He said that the other possibility was to hire someone and train them as an armed security officer, as the Code allowed for it. He said that however, the School Board had expressed concerns about having an armed individual on staff who was not part of law enforcement.

Dr. Yeung said that she thought the vacancies from those SPOs could be used to fund the other positions needed in the County. She said that if the School Division was hiring other security officers and the Sheriff could not fill the current vacancies, she thought the funds could be used for other purposes. She asked how much money was sitting with those 14 vacancies.

Sheriff Decatur said that within a two-year period, they had nine out of the 14 filled. He said that however, it was difficult to retain experienced, dedicated individuals who were passionate about the job. He said that there were also different requirements for elementary schools as opposed to middle schools and high schools. He said that there was an expectation from the community that they wanted their kids safe.

Dr. Yeung asked if the Sheriff would be talking about this with the School Board again.

Sheriff Decatur said that they would continue to work diligently. He said that one of the things they were able to get approved was that some of the funds they had would be allocated towards billing and approving on their website, as well as recruiting. He said that again, it was challenging to attract individuals to work in an elementary school setting, particularly for part-time positions. He said that this was done by design, as most law enforcement agencies in the state of Virginia were part of the Virginia Retirement System (VRS). He said that once they retired, they could return to work part-time.

Dr. Yeung said that her point was that it sounded like those positions were not working, considering the ongoing vacancies.

Ms. Vanuch said that to clarify, all the SRO positions at the middle schools and high schools were filled. She said that the SROs were armed officers employed by the Stafford County Sheriff's Office. She said that the SPOs were dedicated part-time positions for elementary schools, and 10 of those were vacant. She said that she and the Sheriff had discussed the challenges of filling part-time positions, as not everyone was looking for employment in that capacity. She said that the School Division also had security officers, but they were not armed.

Ms. Vanuch said that she believed that they should consider converting the part-time SPOs into full-time positions, using the funds currently allocated by the Schools for unarmed security officers. She said that this would ensure that security was handled only by trained law enforcement officers under the Sheriff's Office, which she believed was essential for the safety of the schoolchildren. She said that she thought this was a worthwhile approach, and she would like to discuss it further with the School Division in their meeting on Thursday. She asked if the Sheriff would support that approach.

Sheriff Decatur said that he was supportive of that. He said that his department had worked very hard to fill those positions and it remained a top priority. He said that they had to rotate manpower and ensure they had coverage while dealing with vacancies.

Ms. Vanuch said that she would appreciate it if the Board would take that issue up with the School Division and decide the best course of action.

Ms. Guy asked if the SPOs would become full-time employees and remain unarmed.

Ms. Vanuch said that no, they would have firearms.

Dr. Yeung said that the School Division did not want them to have guns at the elementary schools.

Ms. Guy said that she would let the School Division speak to the issue.

Ms. Vanuch said that she thought it was crucial to have armed law enforcement at every school in case there was ever an active shooter. She said that the SPOs should be law enforcement officers who were trained to respond to that kind of situation. She said that currently, the Schools had unarmed security guards, which was inefficient. She said that they should convert those positions into full-time Sheriff's Office positions to provide armed law enforcement officers in every single school.

Ms. Evans said that she was trying to understand the need to have armed officers at elementary schools in Stafford County. She said that she understood the intent was to be proactive and prevent a shooting from ever happening, but she was wondering if there had been any events that suggested it was necessary here. She said that she also wondered if the County had sufficient funds to pay for those full-time positions right now.

Sheriff Decatur said that he thought so, and he could provide some historical context that may help answer the question. He said that in 2018, following the Parkland shooting, the School Board came together and adopted a resolution calling for an armed deputy in every school. He said that he was part of the meeting here, along with the Board, and he presented a spreadsheet detailing the estimated costs for each deputy, including equipment. He said that at that time, he explained that the Sheriff's Office did want to move forward with that because it was important to have an armed deputy to protect against any singular event from happening. He said that it would provide a crucial layer of protection and serve as a deterrent.

Sheriff Decatur said that working with the Board, the intent was to start the SPO program, meaning they could bring in deputies to work in elementary schools, with the understanding that they would require different training from what was required for SROs in middle and high schools, such as accident investigation and other specialized skills. He said that as a result, they built the program and presented it to the General Assembly, which ultimately passed it. He said that however, Governor Northam vetoed it. He said that at that point, the County decided to have three SPOs as a pilot program and a supervisor, which they subsequently filled.

Sheriff Decatur said that they met with the School Board and discussed the optimal locations for the SPOs. He said that they chose Hartwood Elementary because of its geographical location, which made it a more feasible option due to the limited resources available in that area. He said that they selected Ann Moncure because, at the time, the commercial property had experienced a high incidence of robberies and crimes. He said that Ferry Farms Elementary was also selected, primarily due to its remote location. He said that the Board funded more positions for the program, but over time it had become difficult to hire people. He said that they had hired some but they ended up leaving.

Sheriff Decatur said that they had promoted it as a part-time position for retired Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (VDCJS) certified law enforcement officers, mirroring the schedule of a teacher and allowing retired officers to still work without impacting their retirement status. He said that to summarize, this began as a community-driven concern, which was further confirmed by the School Board and Board of Supervisors and they agreed that they wanted deputies in the schools. He said that he agreed with the sentiment, absolutely, but he understood there were different opinions on it, which he had heard in detail during his time lobbying for the bill in Richmond.

Ms. Evans thanked Sheriff Decatur for the explanation.

Dr. Yeung said that the Board of Supervisors and School Board could discuss it further in their joint meeting in terms of what the specific solution needed to be, but from her perspective she was concerned about the large number of vacancies and the associated revenue. She said that if positions remained unfilled for multiple years, they needed to do something about that.

Mr. Diggs said that he believed a conversation was necessary with the School Board regarding the two distinct roles of security officers and law enforcement officers. He said that there were differences between what each role could achieve. He said that he wanted to clarify for the public's benefit that the Board was not considering pulling SROs or SPOs out of the schools to fix the budget.

Sheriff Decatur said that to move forward, today, the information he was presenting was purely informational. He said that he understood the budget challenges the Board faced. He said that however, he believed it was his responsibility as Sheriff to inform them about the highly competitive nature of their region and the labor market. He said that he would like to share with them the compensation packages offered by neighboring jurisdictions, including Arlington, Alexandria, Loudoun County, Prince William County, Virginia State Police, and Spotsylvania, which were their comparative jurisdictions. He said that the information provided included the current starting pay for Fiscal Year 26 and the approved budgets for Fiscal Year 27, which showed the pay increases. He said that he thought it was essential for them to be competitive and it was crucial for the Board to be aware of the salaries in their comparative jurisdictions as well as throughout the region.

Sheriff Decatur said that the next handout included the incentives offered by surrounding jurisdictions. He said that with the help of the County Administrator and staff, Stafford County had agreed to a one-for-one credit for certified personnel, which should be beneficial. He said that the final sheet provided regional salaries for deputies in sheriff's offices and police departments, giving them an idea of the competitive landscape of the greater region. He said that in summary, his office was committed to finding a sustainable path forward, moving public safety in the right direction, looking at their neighboring jurisdictions they were competing with, and working together to develop a plan. He said that public safety had a significant impact on economic development, as people moved to their area due to a sense of safety and trust in law enforcement. He said that when families and businesses moved in, it expanded the tax base, which benefited their community.

Mr. English said that he saw that Arlington was giving $15,000 bonuses. He asked if Sheriff Decatur knew whether they gave that all at once or over time.

Sheriff Decatur said that he was not sure, but he knew that some localities did both lump-sum bonuses while others did phased-in approaches, and there were pros and cons to either. He said that he just wanted to provide that information to the Board for them to consider.

Ms. Evans said that she recalled from her time working in Arlington that the bonuses were phased in.

Sheriff Decatur said that in closing, his department would continue to work hard to provide a great service in the County. He said that however, if they fell too far behind neighboring jurisdictions, it would become increasingly difficult to compete. He said that he was proud of the men and women in the Stafford County Sheriff's Office, who consistently demonstrated a strong work ethic and commitment. He said that he wanted to emphasize that those who wore the badge and uniform were living a life of sacrifice. He said that they were willing to put themselves in harm's way, potentially sacrificing their life for a stranger. He said that this dedication was profound and a testament to their training, hard work, and faith. He said that while they were fortunate that not many had to make that sacrifice, it was a reality that they faced every day. He said that he would like to extend his gratitude to the Board for their support.

Ms. Vanuch asked for the total number of positions requested by the Sheriff this year. She said that she recalled them being presented to the Board at their Retreat, but none had been included in the County Administrator's proposed budget. She said that to her knowledge, they had not asked for a new deputy since around 2021.

Sheriff Decatur said that he wanted to note that with the new high school, there was supposed to be an SRO to staff that school, which was included in his request and something he considered a very high priority. He said that they had about five sworn positions and a number of civilian positions, including a Human Resources (HR) Specialist. He said that this was crucial due to the increasing workload at the Sheriff's Office. He said that while they received support from the

County, their growth had led to a need for specialized HR services, as measured by industry metrics.

Ms. Vanuch asked if the Sheriff was still requesting the same number he had submitted previously or if he had a certain priority list. She said that she just wanted to know this as they entered into their budget discussions and tax rates.

Sheriff Decatur said that he believed the top two were an additional deputy to handle traffic safety and the HR Specialist. He said that third would be the SRO for the new high school.

Ms. Evans asked if there were other administrative positions being requested in addition to the HR Specialist.

Sheriff Decatur said yes, there were a number of them.

Ms. Krauss said that the list was included in the budget book.

Dr. Yeung asked if the HR Specialist would be within the Sheriff's Office or the County HR Office.

Sheriff Decatur said that it would be in his office. He said that they currently had two HR staff members.

Dr. Yeung said that this was another example of work she thought may be a bit siloed. She asked how they connected to the County HR Office.

Ms. Krauss said that the County actually integrated the Sheriff's Office HR staff into the County's HR meetings and updates.

Ms. Evans said that the Sheriff did not have to work with the County HR Department. She said that their HR Specialist could choose to just work with the Sheriff. She said that constitutional officers did not have to do that.

Sheriff Decatur said that that was correct; however, they needed the County staff.

<u>ITEM 4. COMMISSIONER OF THE REVENUE, SCOTT MAYAUSKY, BUDGET PRESENTATION</u>

Scott Mayausky, Commissioner of Revenue, said that he wanted to address a potential misconception that may have come out of the Treasurer's earlier presentation regarding their technology. He said that they did utilize cutting-edge technology. He said that they had signed software contracts 20 years ago, but those softwares were constantly being upgraded. He said that multiple times a year, they were upgraded to integrate new technologies. He said that for example, when he first took office, they relied on sending two people every morning to the Clerk's Office to obtain copies of filed documents, as his office maintained the County's land record database. He said that they would read those copies, and then type into a green screen computer the information about the owner, address, and map number information.

Mr. Mayausky said that today, they were fully integrated with the Clerk's Office. He said that those documents were transmitted directly to them, and they were read through an optical character recognition system to pull the required data, which was then automatically updated into their CAMA system. He said that they were not using outdated systems; that was when they originally signed the contract with the company, and the systems and modules they were using today were still being marketed and sold in Virginia, and several of these, with the help of the Treasurer and Ms. Epperson, when she worked in his office, were developed in-house. He said that they were recognized in certain software circles as a great beta test site, and they were willing to work with vendors to find mutually beneficial solutions. He assured the Board that their office was equipped with modern technology.

Mr. Mayausky said that regarding his budget presentation, he was not requesting significant changes, and they were not asking for new positions. He said that the largest reduction was approximately $10,000 in office supplies, which they were willing to accept due to the two-year reassessment cycle. He said that their expenses would dip slightly in the off year for office supplies. He said that if it would help, they were open to accepting that and stretching as necessary. He said that if the Board were to modify the Tax Relief for the Elderly program, as well as conversations had about BPOL, his office might need additional resources to ensure they could effectively administer that. He said that however, if things remained unchanged, they were comfortable with continuing with what they had.

Mr. Mayausky said that their main request was for a $10,000 software called CLEAR, which would help them identify and track citizens. He said that while it may sound a bit intense, it was necessary because his office frequently dealt with situations where people moved without notifying the County whatsoever, and if they were in a relief program, they may not always update the County that they had moved to another state or were renting out their old house. He said that this software would help the County find them, clean up the tax rolls, and if someone needed to be removed from a relief program, this tool would make it clear and easy to do so. He said that CLEAR was used by many law enforcement agencies, and he thought it would be a robust tool in their toolbox.

Mr. Mayausky said that secondly, he wanted to request that the Board retain a line item he had requested for apparel. He said that he had never before asked for this item before but felt compelled to due so after a man was mistaken for a property appraiser and shot by a property owner. He said that he wanted his staff to be identified in order to prevent any confusion in the community. He said that it would be a one-time cost of $5,000 and would put them at the same level as other departments that included apparel as an annual line item.

Ms. Vanuch asked if it would be acceptable for County staff to find that $5,000 in the current year's budget so they did not need to include it in the FY27 budget for this upcoming year.

Mr. Mayausky said that that would work for him.

Ms. Evans asked for confirmation that the $5,000 was specifically for apparel.

Mr. Mayausky said that yes, it was partially because they had to play catch-up, and then if they added it back in every year, it would become much more reasonable, such as a $1,000 annual cost.

Ms. Evans said that she understood and was supportive.

Mr. Mayausky said that the only other significant expenses in their budget were two data center project-related requests that were funded in other budgets. he said that one of these was for legal expenses, as they were working with the County Attorney's Office to ensure that their processes were sound and would not be a weakness in case of a lawsuit. He said that this was not a significant amount of money; they had $10,000 in the first project, and they had not spent it all; they would not spend it unless necessary. He said that the other expense was for education, as their commercial makeup was becoming increasingly complex, with new industries like data centers and distribution facilities. He said that these were much more complex than valuing a grocery store or a gas station.

Mr. Mayausky said that he wanted to ensure that his team was properly educated and had the necessary tools to value these properties accurately, which would protect against lawsuits. He said that they were finding that this education was difficult, as these new industries were not well-represented in the market. He said that they were finding some information, but they needed to increase their subscriptions to industry real estate data, such as Green Street and Marshall & Swift, which tracked every sale throughout the nation. He said that when it came to data centers, it was a national market, not a local one. They needed access to that data, so they were only increasing this expense by $2,000 this year. He said that over the years, the cost may rise, but it would more than pay for itself, as accurate data led to accurate assessments, which in turn led to more tax revenue.

Dr. Yeung said that considering the full build-out of the County's data centers would not be experienced for another 10 to 15 years, the estimated $140 million in tax revenues would not be fully received until then. She said that with the tax rate of $1.25 they had currently, she was wondering if that could be increased to generate more revenue.

Mr. Mayausky said that the regional agreement that established the $1.25 tax rate was not legally binding; rather, it was a gentleman's agreement among the region to help attract data centers. He said that he believed his office avoided recreating the wheel, as other more experienced localities such as Loudoun, Prince William, and Fairfax had not increased those rates until they had a substantial number of data centers already online. He said that in his opinion, if he were making the decision, he would recommend waiting until there was a build-out, assessing the current market, and determining if this remained a desirable location before considering an increase in tax rates. He said that again, this was simply his personal opinion.

Dr. Yeung asked if Mr. Mayausky still thought the full build-out would be another 10 or 15 years in the future.

Mr. Mayausky said that he would need to have the exact information in front of him to refer to, but that sounded right. He said that while he was not disputing it, he would still like to update that number with newer data and in conference with other County departments.

Dr. Yeung said that she was supportive of diversifying their revenue streams as much as possible, including BPOL.

Ms. Evans said that she had a question about the Veterans Tax Relief. She asked if a veteran had applied for and received the tax relief, and then sold their home, would that home still get the tax relief?

Mr. Mayausky said no; the program was non-transferrable and based on the owner at the time. He said that when a property sold, they put it back on the tax rolls. He said that however, in this County, it was common for the new buyer to also be a disabled veteran, but that person must still apply and qualify for the program on their own. He said that the property would automatically go back on the tax rolls first.

## RECESS

The Board recessed at 7:19 p.m. and reconvened at 7:32 p.m.

## WORK SESSION ITEMS (CONTINUED)

### ITEM 5. TRANSPORTATION BIANNUAL UPDATE: SMART SCALE, TAP, CORRIDOR PLANS, AND PROJECT UPDATES

Bryon Counsell, Chief Engineer, said that he was joined by Matt Lehane, Transportation Planning and Funding Manager. He said that they had prepared a robust update for the Board which they could choose to review slide by slide this evening or at their convenience. He said that they were prepared to answer any and all questions the Board had; this was their time to review this transportation-related information as they entered this year's budget season.

Mr. Diggs said that the Board should receive the full presentation before asking questions.

Matt Lehane, Transportation Planning and Funding Manager, said that the FY27 proposed budget allocated $77 million for continuing construction on major projects and wedge widening. He said that this year's proposal added an additional $7 million to the wedge widening to fully fund the program and bring it to substantial completion. He said that in addition, FY28 through FY31 had over $200 million in projects that would be in engineering, starting right-of-way processes, and completing construction, many of which would be completed through the Transportation Bond.

Mr. Lehane said that additionally, FY32 and onward would include additional Smart Scale projects. He said that a key point of discussion for tonight was around some changes made to the CIP this year and some important points related them. He said that Shelton Shop Road had a shortfall. He said that most of it had been funded through congressional earmarks, but there was an additional shortfall of approximately $300,000, which was expected to be funded through the budget this year. He said that US Route 1 and Layhill Road had a $2 million shortfall, with some of it covered, but they hoped VDOT would fulfill their request to provide funding for that. He said that VDOT faced funding difficulties, so this may not happen, and they would need to discuss funding for this project in the future.

Mr. Lehane said that the American Legion and Eskimo Hill project was the most problematic, with its cost doubling from $4.5 million to approximately $9 million. He said that this began as a Smart Scale project a few years back, and as they entered into the engineering phase, the cost had doubled. He said that they were proposing to fully fund this project to keep it moving forward, using available Transportation Fund money and exploring additional grant funding and scope reductions. He said that the key point of this discussion was the Transportation Bond, which had $160 million in major projects ongoing. He said that while not all projects in the Bond had moved forward, scopes had been adjusted to lower costs, and leveraging bond funding had secured additional grants. He said that this had been successful, with the $50 million in Transportation Bond funding securing over $100 million in additional grants through state and federal programs. He said that this had been crucial in keeping their Transportation Program moving forward within their budget.

Mr. Lehane said that they anticipated receiving over $15 million in funding through VDOT programs this year, resulting from the Board's actions last year. He said that revenue sharing, TAP, and other federal programs were positively impacted from that. He said that he wanted to focus on TAP sidewalk projects. He said that it had done well this year, ranking third and fifth in the state for two of their projects out of approximately 70 projects. He said that not everything would be funded, and it was not funded based solely on the ranking or scoring; instead, they were determined by their Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) member's ability to fund projects with the available resources. He said that this was not a decision to be made tonight, he simply wanted to bring to the Board's attention that additional funding was available for various sidewalk projects, but the specifics were not yet certain and would be discussed further as more information became available.

Mr. Lehane said that with the TAP program, they were examining their options for the future. He said that they were reviewing various projects from their Transportation Master Plan and discussing how to move forward with those. He said that they had provided an overview of the current funding cycle, including Mine Road/Greenspring, Kings Highway/Chatham Heights, Barrett Heights Road Sidewalk, and Forbes Street. He said that Kings Highway/Chatham Heights was unlikely to be funded this year, but staff recommended continuing the project and reapplying in FY29. He said that they could still pursue the project through VDOT's revenue sharing program.

Mr. Lehane said that additionally, they were considering new projects in order to prepare for TAP applications in about one year. He said that these new projects were Embrey Mill Road, Bells Hill Road, and Deacon Road. He said that staff would like to hear from the Board what their thoughts were about these potential new projects and how to move forward. He said that they also had the Falmouth Bridge to the Belmont Ferry Farm Trail, which would be completed by VDOT in FY30 or later. He said that at some point in the future, they would look to assign funding for VDOT to build a shared use path connection between the bridge and the trail. He said that this was a future point for discussion.

Mr. Lehane said that another topic was quick build sidewalk projects, which could be completed in a shorter timeframe with less resources. He said that these projects typically required less right-of-way and could be completed within a couple of years. He said that they could complete the necessary engineering and design work upfront and proceed with bidding for these projects.

He said that staff's recommendation would be to implement a CIP allocation of $500,000 annually to complete some of these projects efficiently and without going through a grant process, which was an approach could help reduce costs and expedite completion, potentially knocking off projects from their Master Plan list.

Mr. Lehane said that this brought them to the Smart Scale discussion. He said that project scores were included in the sheet provided in the Board packet. He said that they had made significant progress last year in developing potential scores for these projects. He said that he wanted to emphasize that this was experimental in nature, so the scores would change and results may differ. He said that the scores provided were staff's best estimate based on their knowledge and work on the Smart Scale scoring process last year. He said that this should provide a rough estimate of potential success for these projects, rather than an exact score. He said that the key takeaway was leveraging funding. He said that when they added local money, proffers, or grants, it helped "buy down" their Smart Scale score. He said that as they moved forward, they were looking to leverage more funding in future years for these Smart Scale projects.

Mr. Lehane said that the Smart Scale program was their longest grant program, with the majority of funding allocated in years five and six. He said that as they looked towards Smart Scale projects, the money for the projects was not needed now, nor was the decisions on how to fund them. He said that the only decision necessary at this stage was whether they wanted to put money towards these projects during this budget process, and eventually a resolution to approve the Smart Scale applications later this spring. He said that it would be around $10 million on average per project, with a total of $50 to $60 million in future years. He said that this long-term funding scenario aimed to secure a substantial amount of grant funding for these projects. He said that the proposed funding aligned with their current CIP which was approximately 57% to 58% grant funded. He said that the proposal matched that amount of grant funding on these projects.

Mr. Lehane said that he must note that, in the future, they would need to continue to look forward to future rounds of Smart Scale funding, as it took time to develop applications and address the level of need. He said that if they wanted to pursue projects in the Courthouse area, Route 1 at Hospital Center Boulevard, Kellogg Mill Road and Mountain View Road, and Exit 143/US Route 1/Garrisonville Road, they would need to sit down and determine whether they wanted to proceed with these projects, rather than waiting for external grants or VDOT funding. He said that if there was a prioritized need from the Board, they should discuss that in depth and figure out exactly what it was, get to work on the project, and see where that took them in the future.

Mr. Lehane said that moving on from Smart Scale, they had a few other projects he would briefly review. He said that they had a few corridor plans for Warrenton Road and Garrisonville Road. He said that these had been developed through various Smart Scale applications and they had a number of applications on these roadways. He said that the Smart Scale projects related to these were shorter-term, immediate needs, but they also had long-term improvements including reducing traffic on US-17, such as potentially the Rappahannock River Crossing, and there were pros and cons to that. He said that Garrisonville Road had a long-term improvement at the I-95 interchange. He said that these projects needed to be considered in terms of a prioritization process.

Mr. Lehane said that regarding Centreport Parkway, there was a significant amount of development going on. He said that on Courthouse Road, they needed to consider the identified needs in the corridor and surrounding area due to the significant development happening here. He said that a lot of it was by-right development and needed to be planned for. He said that back in 1998, Embrey Mill was going through its approval process and their traffic impact analysis (TIA) projections indicated that Courthouse Road would reach 60,000 to 70,000 trips per day. He said that they were seeing this growth come to pass, so their goal was to develop alternatives to Courthouse Road, which could be part of their Comprehensive Plan updates.

Mr. Lehane said that the remainder of the presentation would cover federal grants, including the Centreport Parkway Corridor Plan and Safe Streets for All (SS4A) applications. He said that they did not have a safety action plan that currently had any appropriate applications, so they were exploring other potential actions. He said that they were also still working with the Department of Transportation (USDOT) on the previous safety action plan, which they had received feedback on in January and now hoped to move forward this spring. He said that finally, the Secondary Six-Year Plan (SSYP) would provide state funding for secondary roads. He said that they had a balance of projects in the prior year and future years, and they would bring this list to the Board for approval at their first meeting in May and then return with it to request a vote for approval at the second meeting in May, unless otherwise decided by the Board.

Ms. Vanuch said that she saw the Lynnhaven Lane project was marked on the SSYP with $300,000, but they knew that project was not moving forward. She asked if staff could provide an update on the current status so the Board could understand the situation.

Mr. Counsell said that all property owners within the service district were required to donate the necessary property for the roadway, with the dedication to be made to VDOT immediately, as well as for the improvements. He said that they were currently three properties short of meeting the commitment to dedicate the necessary land.

Ms. Vanuch asked if the property owners were adamantly refusing to donate the land.

Mr. Ashton said that the County had earnestly and persistently tried to get the owners to commit the property.

Ms. Vanuch said that her understanding was that this service district was created in order to pave the private road, but as new residents came in, they did not all agree on the project, which led them to this current situation.

Mr. Counsell said that there was still some effort required to meet with property owners who were undecided or noncommittal at this point, in an attempt to provide them with information that may influence their decision one way or the other. He said that they were currently working through the cemetery issue with VDOT. He said that under normal circumstances, VDOT had certain powers that the County did not have through the service district process. He said that they were investigating whether these powers were applicable in this situation and were still awaiting a response from VDOT. He said that while the situation did not appear promising, they would still proceed as best they could.

Ms. Vanuch said that she wanted to bring this up during their budget process because this was meant to be an administrative process through the state in order to get roads paved at the expense of the residents, but they had spent vast amounts of staff time trying to resolve it. She said that she appreciated staff's willingness to make it happen, but she did not like the amount of time being spent on a now-contentious issue among the residents. She said that she thought there should be a time limit to get a decision from the residents so they could decide whether or not to keep it on the SSYP without further delay. She said that they had also spent more than what was initially put in, and that needed to be addressed by the Board because they should not keep collecting funds; they should not have overextended what they had before receiving the authorization.

Mr. Counsell said that he appreciated the feedback.

Dr. Yeung said that she had previously mentioned a study that had an unknown origin, and they were trying to figure out where exactly it came from. She said that the study had received $500,000 from TAP and there were signs on Mine Road and Austin Ridge Road, so she would continue to work with staff to figure out the details of that issue. She said that regarding Smart Scale Round 8, she recalled they had said no to the Exit 143 study, yet it was listed here. She said that she thought if they had distribution centers, data centers, and big companies that wanted to build here, they needed to be the ones to do the studies and provide the County with full, transparent information before they were approved. She said that she would follow up with staff on that issue, as well. She said that she did not want staff to make decisions without justification and subsequent authorization from the Board, so she hoped she did not miss something there. She said that they would continue to figure that out.

Mr. English said that in reference to Smart Scale, he was wondering if there was something they could do to perform a study for Truslow Road. He said that they needed to know more about the conditions of the road due to the new school opening there, so he would like to see that included for Smart Scale.

Mr. Lehane said that he could give an overview of the situation along Truslow Road, he could summarize the key points. He said that the Smart Scale information included a study completed by VDOT for Truslow Road. He said that the VDOT study recommended a realignment of a section of Truslow Road and a roundabout at the intersection of Summer Breeze Lane and Truslow Road. He said that staff proposed it to be a Smart Scale project, and they were happy to discuss it further.

Mr. Lehane said that in addition to the Truslow Road improvements, there were several other improvements planned. He said that they had funded a wedge widening along Truslow Road, which would not only repave the road but also repair the existing wedge and complete an additional wedge further down the road.He said that they were also hoping to go to bid next year for a turn lane at the intersection of Poplar Road and Truslow Road to improve the intersection for the schools. He said that the schools were also constructing improvements at Village Parkway and Warrenton Road. He said that they had a Smart Scale application this year, which would make it six lanes through the intersection of Warrenton Road, providing additional capacity for Warrenton Road and to accomodate the schools.

Mr. English asked if a traffic light at Holly Corner and Route 17 had been discussed yet.

Mr. Lehane said that it had not come up for discussion. He said that he recalled it had previously not qualified for a traffic signal, but they could certainly reach out to VDOT to discuss it.

Mr. Diggs asked staff what their discussion points were for this evening.

Mr. Lehane said that the first discussion point tonight was regarding the TAP grant program because staff was considering getting funding for these projects. He said that during last year's cycle, they had similar discussions in this time frame about the FY27 projects, and now, they were looking ahead to the FY29 cycle, with applications due approximately a year from now. He said that they hoped to move forward and initiate discussions to start working on task orders with consultants for the next set of projects. He said that at this point, there was still uncertainty regarding which projects would receive funding, and they would update the Board once more information became available. He said that as of now, the listed projects and likelihood of funding was their current plan, they would update the Board if any changes or advancements occurred.

Mr. Lehane said that to reiterate, the discussion point centered on identifying which projects to move forward with. He said that in their previous discussions, they decided on four projects for each cycle; two projects in engineering and two in preliminary scope. He said that the initial thinking was to begin engineering on the Embrey Mill Road sidewalk project, followed by Deacon Road and Bells Hill Road.

Dr. Yeung asked if there was a backup plan if they did not get funding in FY27.

Mr. Lehane said that the backup plan would be to move it forward to the FY29 cycle rather than the FY27 cycle, so they would push another FY29 project out to make room. He said that according to the CTB presentation, the recommendation was to fund it, but it was not officially listed as being funded. He said that as a result, there was currently some uncertainty regarding its status.

Ms. Vanuch said that regarding the TAP projects, she had a question on the North Stafford one for Embrey Mill at Crabapple Drive to Eustis. She said that it scored pretty low at 8.26 versus another such as Deacon Road, which was 35.45. She asked why staff prioritized that project versus other ones with higher scores.

Mr. Lehane said that the scoring process did not always follow its guidelines 100%. He said that the VDOT Accessibility Tool was helpful in identifying potential priorities, as it assessed accessibility to other locations in the area, such as nearby stores, schools, and other amenities. He said that the tool provided data on access to these, which was used to inform decision-making. He said that based on that data, along with other needs within the area, such as connecting to a park and extending existing sidewalks, they could make more informed decisions about project priorities.

Ms. Vanuch asked if staff thought it would score better, even though the score may not be that high.

Mr. Lehane said that yes, it was a "buyable" project. He said that looking at that area right now, it had a "desired path" at the end of an existing sidewalk there, as did Bells Hill Road. He said that this was why those two were noted under the North Stafford list. He said that the scoring was a good tool to analyze projects, and a lot of other details went into staff's recommendations.

Mr. Diggs asked if they could move onto the next discussion point.

Mr. Lehane said that next would be the quick build projects. He said that several projects throughout the County had been identified that likely required minimal or no right-of-way and were relatively easy and cheap to build. He said that when grants were considered, the costs were significantly higher, and when right-of-way purchases were necessary, the costs were also much higher. He said that looking at these projects, they appeared relatively simple. He said that the plan was to allocate some local funds and attempt to expedite these projects by exploring a quick build process. He said that it would still take some time to complete, but would be quicker than the typical TAP process.

Mr. Counsell said that for many of their TAP projects, they typically invested between $200,000 and $300,000 on a $1 million project. He said that a 1,000-foot sidewalk constructed under the TAP program, with federal grant funding, took approximately two years to complete and cost around $1 million. He said that using their typical 20% match amount, they could apply that directly to the project and complete the project in significantly less than two years. He said that they had traditionally pursued grant funding in case project costs were higher than anticipated, but they now believed it was time to explore the possibility of using smaller, in-house projects that were low-cost, short-term, and comparable in cost to the grant match. He said that this was why they were bringing this idea to the Board now as a recommendation from staff.

Mr. Ashton said that to be clear on this, the inflection point was the right-of-way. He said that with these projects, the County had control over the right-of-way as opposed needing to acquire it. He said that the costs were driven lower because there was no acquisition process.

Ms. Guy asked if these sidewalk projects would connect to other sidewalks.

Mr. Lehane said that yes, they would. He said that the purpose of this was for the Board to agree to allocate some money, after which staff would develop a process and bring something back to the Board this fall. He said that the next decision point was not necessarily a big one because it was already proposed in the budget, which was to assign funding to Smart Scale projects for future years. He said that the money did not need to be decided on where it was coming from now; it was just a discussion about leveraging money for their Smart Scale projects. He said that the decision point was around what was already in the CIP, which was $50 million to $60 million in bond money to put towards Smart Scale projects.

Mr. Counsell said that this was not the bond they approved in 2019; this was an additional Transportation Bond.

Mr. Lehane said that yes, it would be proposed as bonds, and in FY32, the Board could decide on whatever funding they wanted to use.

Mr. Counsell asked if Mr. Lehane would like to discuss the projects.

Mr. Lehane said that yes, they were currently looking at seven Smart Scale projects. He said that they had previously discussed these with the Board and they had approved three applications at the last Board meeting. He said that these were Route 1/Foreston Woods, Warrenton Road widening, and Garrisonville Road targeted improvements. He said that Garrisonville Road already had assigned funds, so there would be no additional money needed for that project. He said that they also discussed additional improvements on Garrisonville Road, closer to I-95, improvements on Warrenton Road also closer to I-95, and they had two VDOT studies: one along Mine Road and one along Truslow Road. He said that there was additional information on these projects, including project sketches, included in the packet materials available today.

Dr. Yeung asked for more information about Mine Road being not applicable and whether it was through VDOT or DPRT doing that project. She said that she wanted to make sure they were not doing several projects in the same location. She said that they had a flyover at Mine Road that had a lot of money put into it, and then they ended up tossing out the study.

Mr. Lehane said that the project was unfeasible for Smart Scale because it ended up costing way too much money. He said that the purpose of the study was on Mine Road itself and they needed to include Garrisonville Road due to VTrans needs. He said that similarly, Truslow Road's study included Warrenton Road, although the main focus was on Truslow Road. He said that he apologized for the current lack of specific details on the cost estimates, which would be provided in March by their consultants.

Mr. Lehane said that he thought there may need to be additional discussion on Smart Scale Round 8. He said that the initial presentation was intended to start that discussion, as they were indeed ahead of schedule, but Smart Scale projects could take a couple of years to develop, and if they wished to pursue a project along Garrisonville Road Exit 143 on the County side, rather than waiting for VDOT to take action, staff proposed that they begin exploring options now, rather than waiting multiple years for other developments to emerge.

Mr. Diggs asked if the river crossing was included in these transportation projects. He asked if it was different for the County compared to FAMPO.

Mr. Lehane said that it was certainly a discussion point for the Board of Supervisors, particularly if they wished to pursue river crossing projects with Stafford County, rather than going through FAMPO. He said that if the Board wanted to move forward with it as a Smart Scale project and allocate funds from the Transportation Fund to support that project, there was available money. He said that ultimately, it would be up to the Board to decide whether to prioritize that project.

Mr. Diggs said that he was not suggesting that. He said that he recalled they were doing a NEPA study and had moved it from this Smart Scale round to a later round. He said that he was just trying to figure out how that related to this other information and whether the County needed to identify it at this stage.

Mr. Lehane said that the purpose of this was to identify the more localized priorities that the Board may want to consider when looking toward Smart Square Round 8. He said that if there was anything on the list or in the packet the Board wanted to potentially move forward with, that was what staff would like to know.

Ms. Vanuch asked when the Board needed to make a decision on that.

Mr. Lehane said that a decision was not necessary today, but staff recommended having a task order ready to go this fall for one or two projects.

Ms. Vanuch asked if they could have a summer work session dedicated to that.

Mr. Lehane said that yes, they certainly could. He said that the purpose of today's presentation was to initiate the discussion.

Mr. Diggs asked if the Butler Road widening project was happening this year.

Mr. Lehane said that no, the project was not currently funded. He said that it had not received funding through Smart Scale due to its high cost, estimated at approximately $100 million. He said that it was noted as a project in their list, and if the Board were to direct them to proceed with the project, staff's recommendation would be to conduct some initial engineering work, determine a more detailed scope and design, as there were many contingencies built into the VDOT cost estimate. He said that then, they would apply for a revenue-sharing program next year in an effort to secure leveraged funding and build momentum on the project.

Mr. Diggs said that it was evident that the road near Pratt Park and the fire station in that area needed attention.

Mr. Lehane said that it was a good example of why they were beginning these discussions now and why they needed to consider how long this process takes. He said that if they wanted to add Butler Road to the next Smart Scale round, they needed to start the process this fall, apply for revenue-sharing applications next spring, completing all the necessary studies, and then the next year would be when they applied for Smart Scale.

Mr. Counsell said that one of the things that he thought they would start to see emerging from these updates was that the projects they were currently working on were helping them transition from their legacy process to a more comprehensive approach. He said that the Master Plan was now tackling much larger and more complex issues. He said that what they would notice was the increasing adoption of Smart Scale solutions for the Fredericksburg District. He said that in the last round of funding, the Fredericksburg District had received $80 million. He said that some of the projects they were currently planning, which were expected to be completed in the near future over the next 10 years, were projected to cost $100 to $150 million. He said that as they broke them down into smaller, micro-phased projects, which he believed offered no real benefit, it was signaling that the smaller projects were largely complete, and the more challenging ones remained, which would carry more traffic and provide greater benefits to the County. He said that these projects would provide improved interchanges and multiple I-95 crossings on both sides of the highway, and unfortunately, they would not qualify for or be eligible for Smart Scale funding.

Mr. Diggs said that he knew that some of the data center projects upcoming in the County would be providing some improvements to thoroughfares, roadways, and infrastructure. He asked if some of these transportation projects could be coordinated with that.

Mr. Counsell said that for development to contribute to these transportation needs, especially if it had already been approved or was by right, there must be a clear identification of a transportation need caused by the project or in the surrounding area. He said that this required a study and notification to VDOT, which meant they must define the transportation need. He said that it was difficult to determine, and to utilize facilities for development, there must be a planned effort to identify the need and incorporate it into the Master and Comprehensive Plans. He said that the studies would document the need and how it related to the Plans, providing a better opportunity to require a development to pay for the necessary improvements.

ITEM 6. BUDGET WORK SESSION: GENERAL FUND REVIEW

Andrea Light, Chief Financial Officer, said that she would discuss the proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2027. She said that this presentation would cover General Fund revenues, expenditures, and taxes, including real estate, personal property, and other potential taxes. She said that she had provided a slide intended to diagram the complex choices they were making regarding reassessment, the budget, and real estate taxes. She said that the tax year, reassessment schedule, and budget year did not align, which could lead to difficulties in terms of management. She said that to address this, staff tried to break down the complexities.

Ms. Light said that the reassessment occurs every two years, with the goal of distributing the tax burden fairly and accurately. She said that in Calendar Year 2026, which was a reassessment year, tax rates were based on a calendar year. She said that therefore, the tax rates set in April 2026 would be effective January 1, 2026. She said that when the Board made a decision on the budget for FY27, it would take effect July 1, 2026 through June 30, 2027. She said that changing the tax rate in April 2026 could impact the budget as well as collections in 2027. She said that she hoped this helped clarify the matrix of choices the Board was working through.

Ms. Light said that she had also provided a graphic which demonstrated the distribution of tax dollars, with designated revenues removed. She said that for example, Parks received money from program users, such as recreational sports fees, so that type of revenue was not included. She said that for every dollar of tax revenue received, $0.55 went to public education and $0.21 went to public safety, so 76% of all tax dollars went towards those two entities.

Mr. Diggs asked for clarification regarding the $0.55 being put towards education. He asked if that was inclusive of state funding, or if the $0.55 was directly from the County.

Ms. Light said that it was local taxpayer dollars from the County.

Ms. Light said that she had provided the "budget placemat" to the Board, which showed a simplified version of what had changed between the FY26 adopted budget and the FY27 proposed budget. She said that on the top left, they could see the adopted tax rates, the proposed tax rates, and the change in the adopted rate. She said that the budget offered savings of over $4.43 million. She said that the proposed budget was $45 million higher than the adopted budget of FY26, with approximately $5 million of that being one-time funding. She said that the budget also included employee changes, such as health insurance increases passed to employees, which increased from 6% to 20%, and a 4% pay increase.

Ms. Light said that on the right-hand side, in the red boxes, were the mandatory items, including partner agencies, such as the Jail and Juvenile Detention Center, which received $4.5 million in funding. She said that the Library had requested $500,000, and the proposed budget allocated about half of that, at $250,000. She said that the Sheriff's Department had a Motorola contract for $1.9 million annually, replacing their current contract. She said that there were other contracts with County departments totaling $1.4 million, covering systems, policy requirements, and other initiatives.

Ms. Light said that employee pay was listed in the blue boxes for consideration, and Schools funding was located in the purple boxes at the bottom. She said that she would like to bring to the Board's attention that the Schools' 3R funding was currently in a negative $790,000 position, which was offset by one-time funding. She said that the 3R funding was not going away; rather, this was a change in the funding source. She said that similarly, when it came to Transportation, the proposed budget reduction of $3 million had been backfilled by one-time funding, which would not result in a loss to the Transportation budget. She said that the same approach had been taken with this Schools funding.

Ms. Krauss asked if this was in addition to the Board's action last year to set aside funding for emergency 3R items.

Ms. Light said that yes, this was in addition. She said that in 2019, the Board dedicated about $1.2 million to Schools 3R Program, and they had increased that to about $1.7 million, maintaining that same dedication. She said that the Schools' 3R was about $20 million every year, so this was helping move it forward a bit.

Mr. Diggs said that he was somewhat confused about the numbers provided on the placemat.

Ms. Vanuch said that she agreed. She said that it looked like some of these numbers were incorrect. She asked if the FY26 adopted budget from last year was $453 million.

Ms. Light said yes.

Ms. Vanuch said that the FY27 proposed budget presented by Mr. Ashton was $498 million.

Ms. Light said that was correct.

Ms. Vanuch asked if Ms. Light would fix the box on the placemat.

Ms. Light said yes.

Mr. Diggs said that the total increase was $45 million. He asked what the $9 million difference was in relation to this. He asked if it was due to increases in assessments.

Ms. Light said that when examining the difference between reassessments, the reassessment effective rate was $0.865 cents. She said that the revenue that brought in compared to the $0.9236 rate was a $9 million difference. She said that this was a $45 million budget, not a $9 million budget, and $5 million of that $45 million was one-time funding. She said that the items in the small boxes were the choices the Board was able to act on.

Mr. Diggs said that he was still trying to understand their current position.

Ms. Vanuch said that the assessments had been completed, and if the Board wanted to vote for an effective tax rate in order to offset the increase in their assessments, they would have to approve a tax rate of $0.865. She said that in order to achieve that, the Board would have to cut $9 million out of the current budget. She said that this would mean cutting out all of the items included in the small boxes on the placemat, as well as finding an extra $9 million in their current budget.

Mr. Diggs asked if Ms. Vanuch was saying that in order to get to the effective rate and avoid a tax increase, all of these items would have to go away and they still would have to come up with $9 million.

Ms. Vanuch said that yes, they still had to come up with $9 million. She said that when they voted on an effective tax rate in a budget year, which was different from the year the Commissioner was running, they were essentially taking the six months from January to June, which they thought would be at a higher rate, and then removing that amount, effectively lowering the taxes created by the Board for those six months. She said that this was where they needed to come up with the $9 million. She said that if the Board recalled from last year, she repeatedly emphasized how they needed to cut more from the budget, and that was because they would need to do so in order to prevent a tax increase this year.

Mr. Diggs asked if they kept everything in, the tax rate would be $0.985.

Ms. Light said that the proposed budget assumed a tax rate increase to $0.985 from last year's $.9236 tax rate. She said that in order to have an effective tax rate, the Board would need to shave off more than $25 million. She said that there was an increase in this budget. She said that the effective tax rate no longer made any sense when looking at Stafford County's residents due to the state-mandated exonerations. She said that the state-mandated exonerations were approximately $40 million.

Mr. Ashton said that to clarify, during last year's budget he estimated the exonerations would be around $22 million, and as of his budget presentation a few days ago they were at $29 million. He said that by the end of this year, they estimated it would be at $40 million.

Ms. Vanuch asked if the current tax rate was $0.9236.

Ms. Light said yes.

Ms. Vanuch said that she apologized for the misunderstanding; she thought it was $0.86.

Ms. Light said that for Calendar Year 25, the Board adopted $0.9236 as the tax rate. She said that in Calendar Year 26, the County Administrator proposed $0.985. She said that the tax cycle ran for the calendar year, while they were on a fiscal year budget cycle. She said that if the County only did annual billing instead of biannual billings, it would be easier and they could take half a year of tax collections out of their revenue projections. She said that for personal property, that was $30 million and for real estate it was $130 million.

Ms. Krauss said that this was what Mr. Sienkowski was discussing earlier in the meeting.

Ms. Light said that referring to the budget placemat, the boxes depicting the tax rates were correct. She said that they were on a calendar year tax cycle. She said that the total tax rates that a person would pay on their real estate for Calendar Year 25 was $0.9367 including real estate and the fire levy. She said that in Calendar Year 26, the proposed rate was $0.999, which included $0.985 for real estate and $0.014 for the fire levy. She said that this fiscal year, staff wanted to focus on the choices before the Board. She said that the County Administrator had already cut 2% from every departmental budget. She said that the constitutional officers had already discussed those cuts today and noted some of the potential impacts, and the same was true for all other departments.

Mr. Diggs said that he recalled Ms. Allen's comment from the Board's last meeting, which was that the budget was so skinny there was nothing left to trim. He said that from what Ms. Light had presented so far, it looked like their only choices were to take away employee pay or take away some of the $15 million for the Schools.

Ms. Light said yes; these were the choices, other than reducing services.

Mr. Diggs asked what reducing services would entail. He asked if that would mean laying off employees.

Ms. Light said yes.

Mr. Ashton said yes.

Mr. Diggs said that returning back to the equalized rate, he was under the assumption that they had to cut $9 million. He asked how much they would need to cut in order to get to the effective rate.

Ms. Light said that it would be between $32 million and $35 million.

Ms. Vanuch asked how Ms. Light came up with that number.

Ms. Light said that the increase was $25 million for real estate, which was the increase in the FY27 proposed budget. She said that if they subtracted that amount, and then subtracted another $9 million to achieve the effective tax rate, the total would be approximately $35 million.

Mr. Diggs said that when they got to the CY26 proposed rate, that included the fire levy and real estate, that was the $0.06 increase in the tax rate as proposed by the County Administrator. He said that this included the 2% cut across all departments.

Mr. Ashton said that was correct. He said that he had proposed to take out 2% across the board, and all of the boxes on the right-hand side of the placemat would still be included. He said that the $0.06 increase was the number they would need to align with that proposal.

Mr. Diggs said that last year, the Board had some more choices, but he noted that this year they did not have any of those variables.

Ms. Allen asked if they had finished funding the Jail and paying their debt from last year. She said that moving forward, she would like to know if they even had ability to touch any of the mandatory funds.

Ms. Krauss said that as Ms. Light had indicated, they were taking the Jail into consideration, the mandated increase to the Juvenile Detention Center, and the Library was not fully funded. She said that the other partner agencies were level-funded at about $300,000 and that was included in the total number.

Mr. Diggs asked if it was correct that the total funding for all the other partner agencies was $300,000.

Ms. Krauss said yes. She said that most of it was funding the Jail and Juvenile Detention Center and the Library.

Ms. Allen said that she wanted to make sure the Board was aware that they could not try to underfund the Jail again, which they had attempted last year.

Mr. Ashton said that regarding the Jail, that number put last year's increase plus this year's increase into the operational side of the budget, per their Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

Dr. Yeung said that the Board would hear more from the School Board regarding their Division's mandatory items during their joint meeting on Thursday. She said that there were also some items that had been deemed necessary but the Board had not received updates on, so she would like to know the success of those items so they knew the funding should remain. She asked if the reductions to certain departments were more than 2% when considering the level-funding and the raises.

Ms. Light said that she believed that information was included in the red boxes on the placemat.

Dr. Yeung said that she did not want to tell departments what specific items to cut; the departments could determine how to fund their programs themselves. She said that she was concerned about the taxpayers at this point.

Ms. Evans asked if it was correct that the County was not required to fund any of the partner agencies.

Ms. Krauss said that it depended. She said that she thought they should fund the Health District and fund their Community Mental Health. She said that all members of George Washington Regional Commission (GWRC) paid to fund that organization. She said that the ones the Board could choose to not fund were their community partners, such as EmpowerHouse, Disability Resource Center, Healthy Families, Healthy Generations, Micah, and Piedmont.

Ms. Evans asked what the criteria staff used when determining whether or not to fund a partner.

Ms. Krauss said that there was a scoring criteria that she could send to the Board, based on five different metrics. She said that the criteria assessed the agencies' population served, deliverables, data tracking, mission, and revenue. She said that each section was scored independently, and then a general score. She said that if an agency had not been funded in the past, it meant they had received a very low score. She said that the average score was about 84, so if they scored in the 40s, 50s, or 60s, they were unlikely to be recommended for funding.

Ms. Light said that the second piece of consideration was money. She said that if the Board decided not to provide additional funding, the available funds must be allocated among the agencies, with a specific percentage reduction from each agency. She said that this process involved a methodology to ensure that the funds were distributed fairly and that agencies were not unfairly disadvantaged. She said that furthermore, the County did not fund the agencies in general; they funded programs, so an agency may receive funding for one program and no funding for another.

Ms. Evans said that she would like to talk about this a bit more in her one-on-one meetings with staff. She said that she thought they could start off by reducing the funding to the partner agencies. She said that for example, Micah Ministries was proposed to be funded with $55,000 from the County, but they just received a $2.9 million grant from the state.

Ms. Krauss said that the funding for Micah was specifically for the cold weather shelter located in Stafford County. She said that the other grant was related to the Jeremiah Project and other initiatives they were undertaking. She said that this funding was distinct from the other grant. She said that in the winter, when residents utilized the cold weather shelter, which was located in the old RAI building on King George Highway, this funding was specifically to operate that shelter. She said that she was happy to address any questions the Supervisors may have.

Mr. Krauss said that while she believed their partners effectively filled the gap and met the needs of County residents when they cannot access services elsewhere, it was essential to acknowledge that when the County needed to tighten their budget, it was understandable. She said that their partners also recognized the importance of securing funding through grants, donations, events, and other means. She said that she thought the partner agencies understood, but when the Board was considering something like that, they needed to be consistent in their methodology and approach.

Ms. Allen said that earlier, it was mentioned that they could just take off all the items on the right-hand side of the placemat, but some of those items could not be taken off, such as debt service. She asked if Ms. Light could review those items that were not optional. She said that she was unsure of the $15 million for Schools, but she did not think the Board should consider taking away the other item for 3R funding for schools, as an example.

Mr. Diggs said that if he recalled correctly, the $15 million included $10.6 million in opening costs for the high school and the two elementary schools, and approximately $4.5 million allocated for staff pay increases. He said that as he recalled, that was not even covering half of the amount needed for their staff pay increases.

Ms. Guy asked if the $790,000 for 3R funding was the total amount of money for 3R, or if it was an increase above last year.

Ms. Light said that the $790,000 that they had removed from ongoing funding; instead, it was now supported by one-time funding. She said that the Schools had requested approximately $20 million in 3R funding for FY27, which was included in the CIP. She said that most of this funding would be debt-funded, but all of their 3R requests were accurately represented as submitted to them in the CIP.

Ms. Guy how much 3R funding would be sent to the School Division for this school year.

Ms. Light said that it would be $1 million in recurring funding and $790,000 of one-time funding, and $18 million in bond funding.

Ms. Guy asked if the total amount of 3R funding for this year was all of those numbers combined.

Ms. Light said that was correct. She said that was what they had asked for, so in this proposed budget, County staff had not changed their request.

Ms. Vanuch said that the Virginia Senate recently passed their budget, which she believed was voted on yesterday. She asked if the County had matched that budget, considering the significant changes the General Assembly made from Youngkin's budget to Spanberger's budget. She said that she would like to see the specifics of the education change. She said that if there was anything in that budget to offset the costs to Schools or other areas, they definitely needed to know before the Board advertised their tax rate.

Ms. Vanuch said that additionally, the Schools had informed the Board a few months ago that the state would be funding over $10 million in standards of quality (SOQ) positions for the opening of the new schools, and she would like to see the exact numbers the state was providing. She said that she knew the Schools wanted to add more positions, and they had other positions that they planned to redistribute. She said that however, they needed to determine if all the School Division positions were essential. She said that as reviewed her notes, and the School Division budget had increased by 53% over the last three years including State and County funds. She said that the amount the County had allocated for Schools had increased by 33% just in the last three years, not including this year. She said that the Board needed to engage in thorough conversations to parse out what was necessary and what was not.

Ms. Guy said that she would be glad to have that conversation. She said that the Board of Supervisors had underfunded the School Division's requests by $100 million over the past decade. She said that this was a fact, although the Board could debate whether or not the requests were justified. She said that the School Board presented their budget to the Board of Supervisors on an annual basis, and they always explained the cuts they had made to arrive at that proposed budget, just like on the County side. She said that it was inappropriate to suggest the cuts were not being made; it was untruthful.

Ms. Vanuch said that her point was that the Schools budget had increased by 53% in the past three years. She said that there was no other department in the County that had increased by that much. She said that her main focus was on the proportional increase, not the total dollar amount. She said that the spending was out of control. She said that she thought they needed to look at the budget from what was absolutely necessary to fund from a legal perspective and what was optional.

Ms. Allen said that it was very important to be respectful in these conversations. She said that it was inappropriate to suggest that their educators should be devalued. She said that since she had joined this Board, the lack of respect shown to educators was appalling. She said that it was very concerning to her when it was suggested that the Schools needed to cut their funding, especially since the consistent feedback from the community was that their top two priorities were public safety and schools. She said that those priorities were reflected in the County's budget.

Ms. Vanuch said that she wanted to bring up one additional point. She said that in Arlington, their proposed budget included a tax increase and the closure of their gymnastics and library facilities. She said that additionally, they were freezing or eliminating 56 staff positions and would not be providing the normal increase to the Arlington public schools, reflecting ongoing financial challenges due to their declining commercial revenues. She said that she wanted to emphasize that Stafford was not the only County that was having financial troubles, and there would have to be hard decisions.

Ms. Vanuch said that she was not saying she did not appreciate teachers or trying to attack them. She said that they needed to take a hard look at what was required spending and what was not, just as they did in the Treasurer's Office or Commissioner's Office. She said that she did not appreciate the narrative that she was singling out the School Division in that regard. She said that her point remained that they had spent way too much money as a Board. She said that if they wanted to address the tax rate, they had to have these conversations without emotion and without assumptions being made. She said that they needed to identify what needed to be funded this year and what did not.

Mr. English said that to get to the heart of the matter, he believed that the County needed to be audited and the School Division needed to be audited. He said that they needed to conduct an audit to see how their money was being spent, as he had personally reviewed some of it and was shocked at what he had found. He said that he recalled the difficult budgetary decisions they made during the COVID-19 pandemic and thought they needed to treat this as a similar situation.

Mr. Diggs said that he heard all of his colleagues' comments and understood their perspectives. He said that he wanted to protect the taxpayer, but the Board also had to make hard decisions and think about where they heading in terms of the future of the County. He said that if they had the hard conversations, they could get there. He said that additionally, they had to protect County staff and employees, who were the heartbeat of the County. He said that they could make cuts here and there, but he knew from talking to their employees that with this budget as currently proposed, people would be taking home less pay. He said that if they provided the 4% raise, there would still be employees taking home less in their paychecks, and that concerned him. He said that looking at the sheet the Sheriff presented, which was similar to what the Schools had presented, they were so far behind in terms of competitive incentives and benefits to attract and retain qualified employees in the County.

Mr. Diggs said that he agreed this was a tough year, but next year would be tough, too. He said that framing the conversation mattered, and facts mattered, but he hoped they could all come together and find a way to do this. He said that messaging mattered as well, because they already had many vacancies they struggled to fill and did not need to lose additional employees because of poorly phrased statements or poorly thought-out suggestions. He said that he also did not want to lose the generational Stafford residents who were born and raised here. He said that they had to think about people who may lose their homes because they could not afford the next tax increase. He said that further, there were elderly folks who did not know how to access resources in the County, which served as a reminder they had a lot of challenges to work through.

Dr. Yeung said that she had to leave the meeting at this time due to a family commitment.

Ms. Light said that she would move onto the more positive part of her presentation. She said that some basic real estate information that they all knew was that the penny was worth approximately $2.6 million, new construction was projected at 2.25%, and she would like to bring this up because it was a significant point that they could all agree on. She said that this was largely due to data centers. She said that they were projecting about $3.4 million in real estate revenue from data centers in Fiscal Year 27. She said that it would come in during the second half of FY27, so the June 2027 collection was what was included in this proposed budget.

Ms. Light said that she would like to draw the Board's attention to the personal property tax rates, as this budget was being crafted. She said that they had reviewed several personal property tax rates, including those for vehicles, which were proposed to be raised to $5.72 in this budget. She said that business property, camping trailers and recreational vehicles, and all other items were proposed to be raised to that same $5.72 rate. She said that it would generate about $450,000 in new revenue. She said that mobile homes were also requested to increase to match the real estate tax rate, per State Code. She said that they were also proposing a solar farm tax, with two projects in the County, estimated to generate $10,500 in tax.

Ms. Light said that additionally, there had been some changes in their consumption taxes. She said that transient occupancy tax (TOT) was at 11%, which was the highest she could find across the Commonwealth of Virginia. She said that there was no limit to this tax, so they could go higher if necessary. She said that 2% of the TOT revenue went to Parks Capital, 3% to Tourism, and 6% to the General Fund. She said that the meals tax was at 6%, which was the maximum allowed by the Code of Virginia and provided an additional $3.2 million to Schools. She said that the cigarette tax was at $0.40 per pack. She said that to clarify, a vape tax was not allowed, as it was a state regulation. She said that the cigarette tax was a waning revenue as less people were smoking in general.

Ms. Light said that some Board members had asked about potential taxes to explore. She said that Business, Professional, and Occupational Licensing (BPOL) tax was a major one to consider. and She said that aircraft and boats were not currently taxed, as they had been removed from taxation in 2009 and 2013, respectively. She said that if the Board were to consider adding the boat tax and the airplane tax, this would be a good opportunity for them to gauge that interest and they could then include it in the public hearing and advertisement. She said that the Commissioner and she could collaborate to develop a proposal to bring back to the Board for consideration as a revenue source.

Mr. Diggs said that he thought things should be even across the board as they considered additional taxes. He said that considering they had a local airport and a significant number of planes, he would be supportive of the aircraft tax, as well as the boat tax.

Mr. Diggs said that the challenge with the boat tax was that no one in their area taxes boats, making them highly mobile and easy to relocate. He said that in the Game and Inland Fisheries database, it was simple to change the docking jurisdiction and jurisdiction of a boat. He said that unfortunately, they no longer had an accurate list of boats in their area, so they would need to rebuild it using this data. He said that registering a boat in nearby Counties was very easy for people to do. He said that this would likely result in a low tax revenue yield, and it would be an inefficient tax system in terms of requiring significant manpower to generate $500,000 in revenue.

Mr. Diggs said that nevertheless, it was something staff could consider if the Board would like them to explore it further. He said that airplanes would be easier to manage because there were fewer of them, and there was only one airport. He said that however, they were also mobile. He said that what they could do was take a closer look at what regional airports in Virginia were doing, which may provide some guidance. He said that they could do the same with boats in order to better understand the regional situation.

Mr. Diggs said that regarding BPOL, he had heard arguments for and against implementing it. He said that he recalled Ms. Barber, their Director of Economic Development, had explained to the Board that businesses were not concerned whether the County had BPOL or not. He said that he said that if that was the case, he did not see a reason to avoid collecting it.

Ms. Light said that she would provide more information on BPOL. She said that Stafford County was one of the few Counties in the Commonwealth that did not have this license. She said that instead, they had merchant's capital. She said that if the Board decided to implement BPOL, they would have to eliminate merchant's capital. She said that merchant's capital was approximately $1.1 million in the FY26 budget and was proposed to be similar, with a slight increase, in the FY27 budget. She said that she had provided additional information about how BPOL would work. She said that the Board would adopt a tax rate for BPOL in April of 2026. She said that the Commissioner of the Revenue Office would have a significant amount of work to do to educate businesses and ensure they had all the necessary information.

Ms. Light said that the Commissioner's Office was not staffed to handle this initiative; they would need two positions to support this implementation. She said that businesses would self-report in March of 2027. She said that the Board would set the calendar year rate in 2026, which would impact 2027 collections. She said that the Commissioner of Revenue would review the filing, with payments due in April 2027. She said that the action from the Board would be to adopt the tax rate. She said that in working with the Commissioner, they must set the BPOL at the same rate for the various categories in order to prevent businesses from self-reporting as the type of industry with the lowest rate.

Mr. Ashton said that another concern was that a business may report as being in one type of business for years and then decide they were in a different kind of category, which would require the County to rebate their money. He said that by keeping the categories' tax rates the same, they prevented that kind of situation.

Mr. English asked if, instead of BPOL, a business could just pay a business license fee. He said that for example, a mom-and-pop store would only pay a small fee, and as their business grew, they would pay more. He said that he thought there could be a threshold in order to ensure the fees were scaled to the business, so there would not be an undue burden on businesses with smaller incomes.

Mr. Mayausky said that it was a good idea. He said that there were two components to the BPOL: a license fee and a gross receipts tax. He said that the problem was that the County did not have the authority to create a sliding scale for the fee, as it seemed Mr. English was suggesting. He said that the fee was capped at $50. He said that what could be done was to implement a threshold similar to what Spotsylvania County had in place. He said that in their case, the threshold was $2 million, which protected smaller businesses. He said that under this system, if a business fell under the threshold, it paid the County $50. He said that if the business exceeded the threshold, the gross receipts tax kicked in, and the BPOL fee was applied. He said that the $50 cap was state law.

Mr. Diggs said that according to staff's presentation, the BPOL could potentiall provide $2.65 million in revenue. He asked if that would impact the tax rate, and if it would allow them to reduce the tax rate by $0.01 so the increase would be $0.05 instead of $0.06.

Ms. Light said that was correct. She said that it provided the Board with some options on what they could do. She said that it was important to note that they did not collect information on businesses. She said that they looked at Spotsylvania's actual revenues received in their Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR) in FY25, took half of that, and subtracted the merchant's capital because they could not have both at the same time.

Ms. Guy said that she thought Mr. Diggs' had brought up a good point about reducing the tax rate with that extra revenue. She said that however, her initial thought was that the revenue could be used to fund some of the positions identified as needed in the County government. She said that regardless, she appreciated the direction their conversations were going and hoped they could keep working to get to a point where they were making some positive changes.

Mr. Diggs said that he understood Ms. Guy's perspective as well. He said that his only hesitation with adding new positions was that it would make next year's budget even more difficult because they would have to pay for those positions next year. He said that they already knew their costs would be increasing next year, so adding anything to their costs would only add to the pressure. He said that in a few years, there would be data center revenues that could potentially change the conversation.

Ms. Light asked if the Board wanted staff to bring information back so they could make decisions and potentially hold a public hearing on these additional taxes.

Ms. Vanuch said that she could not support discussion on the BPOL tax. She said that she encouraged everyone to review the previous public meeting where the BPOL tax was brought up and repealed, which was one of the longest public meetings they ever had. She said that even if they tried to create the threshold to gear it toward large businesses, the business associations would push back due to their policies that opposed implementation of these types of business taxes. She said that she would never vote in support of this initiative; however, if the Board chose to do this, she thought it needed to happen outside of the budget cycle when they had time to listen to public comment and craft it well in order to prevent creating further issues.

Rysheda McClendon, County Attorney, said that she wanted to ensure the Board was aware of the ordinance requirements and how this would work. She said that this was not simply a matter of imposing a tax; rather, the Board would need to adopt an ordinance, and the State Code provided a model for this. She said that as a result, the Board would need to hold a separate public hearing, in addition to its tax rate, budget, CIP, and other public hearings, specifically on the BPOL ordinance. She said that she asked that the Board take this into consideration. She said that additionally, they would need to draft the ordinance, which was largely driven by state code, but also influenced by options and considerations, asnoted by Mr. Mayausky, such as limits and exemptions. She said that therefore, it was essential to provide direction on this aspect as well. She said that it was worth noting that there was an ordinance creation process that would need to be undertaken as part of this initiative, making it a more involved process.

Ms. Light said that this could be done after the budget process.

Mr. Diggs said that there was consensus from the Board to bring it back for further discussion after the budget cycle.

Ms. Light said that their budget calendar was published and adopted by the Board. She said that their next work session would be a joint meeting with the School Board and Board of Supervisors on Thursday, February 26, 2026. She said that at the Board's regular meeting on March 3, 2026, staff would be bringing forward a number of requests to advertise public hearings for the budget, CIP, debt issuance, and the tax rate.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The Board adjourned its meeting at 9:30 p.m.

William H. Ashton, II
County Administrator