



### **For Immediate Release**

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## **Talbot County Council Budget Introduction, Tuesday, April 18, 2023**

*These highlights only reflect the 2024 Fiscal Budget Introduction covered from the Council's approved agenda. To view the complete County Council meeting, please visit: Talbot County Meeting Videos - Talbot County, Maryland ([www.talbotcountymd.gov](http://www.talbotcountymd.gov)).*

Council members Callahan, Haythe, Mielke and Stepp were in attendance. Council member Leshar was absent.

Talbot County's Manager, Clay Stamp, and Finance Director, Martha Darling Sparks, joined the Talbot County Council to present the Fiscal Year 2024 Proposed General Fund Budget. The \$128.8 million proposed general fund budget maintains core services, provides for workforce stability, and includes investments in the county's key project areas including Public Safety and Health, Infrastructure, Environment, Education, and Economic Stability.

The FY 24 Budget shows an increase from FY 2023 funding levels and still maintains a healthy fund balance, "Rainy Day" fund, in order to be prepared for economic uncertainty.

### **Budget Highlights**

#### **Investment in Emergency Services and Public Safety**

"Investing in solutions to our Health and Emergency Services is critical to maintaining a good standard of living for our citizens. We must make sure our services are fully funded, and fully supported," said Chuck Callahan, Council President.

Support includes:

- Expansion of the County's 24/7 Paramedic Unit, which will improve response times
- \$2.08 million for 911 Division replacement of Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) software
- \$800,000 in capital project to build new EMS Station in Cordova, MD
- 10 new positions in emergency services and public safety, which include certified EMTs, Paramedics, and School Resource Officers (SRO)
- \$330,000 for Detention Center Improvements

#### **Improving Infrastructure**

The budget includes \$1.95 million in capital funding to support the county's initiative to extend water and sewer to different areas of the county. "Extending sewer to various areas of the county, connecting failing septic systems, and upgrading and improving our sewage system continues to be a priority to protect the health and safety of our citizens, and the Chesapeake Bay," said Callahan.

Capital projects also include \$500,000 for county wide road improvements.

### **Education**

The County continues to support capital initiatives and investment in Education. Talbot County Public Schools will receive \$50.9 million in operational funding, which is an increase of \$4.1 million from last year. This exceeds the required local share contribution in order to meet state-mandated Blueprint requirements.

The budget also includes \$900,000 in capital funding to support the Chapel District Elementary School renovation project.

Chesapeake College's FY24 budget request is fully funded and demonstrates the county's commitment to continuing education for all ages including workforce programs.

### **Maintaining a Dynamic Workforce**

The budget also emphasizes the importance of a dynamic workforce. "It's important to maintain the investment in our employees, who are the backbone of our service delivery, in what has become a highly competitive workforce environment," mentioned Callahan.

This support includes:

- 4% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) and 1 Step for County employees
- Funding increases to volunteer fire departments to support training efforts and to address personnel retention and recruitment efforts

### **Creating a Balanced Budget**

The budget forecasts an overall 14% increase in revenue compared to previous fiscal year. This includes the proposed increase in property tax to support Talbot County Public School's budget initiatives, and the previously authorized increase in tax to support public safety.

"The county continues to maintain the lowest property tax rate in the state and the second lowest income tax rate. Funding for Talbot County Public Schools will be provided for through the 4.8 cent Education Supplement this year. We continue to be a fiscally conservative county that also supports investment in people, processes, and projects in key areas," said Sparks.

Ms. Sparks noted that both Moody's Investors Services and Fitch Ratings have affirmed the County's budgeting strategy by affirming strong bond ratings (AAA by Fitch and an upgrade to Aa1 by Moody's) with Fitch noting, "Fitch's assessment of the county's financial resilience as being in the highest category is based on the combined strength of its fund balance position, its ample expenditure flexibility and its strong ability to adjust revenues through policy action to counterbalance its historically volatile revenues. The county typically increases its property tax levy by the full amount allowed annually under the county charter."

Additionally, during the meeting, the Council unanimously approved 4<sup>th</sup> quarter budget transfers as proposed by Ms. Sparks and authorized under Section 615 of the Talbot County Charter. These transfers focused on the purchase of capital outlay items.

**Public Hearings on the proposed budget will be held on Tuesday, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2023 at 2:00PM (Bradley Meeting Room) and 7:00PM (Easton Elementary School Cafeteria).** The public is invited to submit written public comments by Monday, May 1<sup>st</sup> 2023 to [publiccomment@talbotcountymd.gov](mailto:publiccomment@talbotcountymd.gov)

The FY 2024 Proposed Budget (Bill #1529) will be available on our website at [https://talbotcountymd.gov/pending\\_legislation](https://talbotcountymd.gov/pending_legislation)