



MACHINE TRANSCRIPT • CORAGGIO CONSULTING

City of Fairfax City Council Work Session, Tuesday, March 4, 2025

Date Tuesday, March 4, 2025
Place City Hall, City of Fairfax, Virginia
Length 3h 58m (video)

- Official meeting video (city, Granicus): https://fairfax.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=13&clip_id=4128
- Agenda: https://fairfax.granicus.com/AgendaViewer.php?view_id=13&clip_id=4128
- Minutes: https://fairfax.granicus.com/MinutesViewer.php?view_id=13&clip_id=4128&doc_id=3777c770-f9eb-11ef-ab6a-005056a89546

Machine transcript (speech-to-text) produced by Coraggio Consulting. Not an official county record. Names and numbers may be misspelled; check the video at the timestamp before quoting.

Speech-to-text: whisper.cpp, model large-v3-turbo. Produced 2026-10-13. Each paragraph starts with its time [HH:MM:SS] in the meeting video.

[00:00:10] Good evening. I would like to call the work session of March 4th, 2025 to order. We have three items on the agenda, very meaty, meaty items, and we are glad to see our school board members here to discuss with us how we move forward together.

[00:00:30] So, Ms. Clark, would you get us started? Yes. The first work session item is a joint discussion with the school board on the proposed FY26 budget with a presentation by schools. Carolyn Pitches, school board chair, and Jeffrey Plattenberg, city school superintendent, will provide the presentation.

[00:00:49] Good evening, council and mayor and staff. I'm Carolyn Pitches. I'm the chair of the city school board, and why don't we all introduce ourselves? Christina Sessori, Lauren Bartlemay, Sarah Kelsey.

[00:01:11] Okay, we're pleased to be here. We're grateful for the opportunity to discuss our FY26 budget with all of you. We know there are some challenges, and hopefully we can work together to address some of those.

[00:01:28] And I'll turn it over to the superintendent. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Good evening and thank you for allowing us to present the FY2026 school board approved budget this evening. Tonight

in our presentation, I'd like to also acknowledge Mr. Dan Phillips, the assistant superintendent for the school system as well.

[00:01:49] Tonight our presentation is going to include five different components that we're going to be speaking about. The first component is the actual budget components of the approved budget. The second one is the school services agreement or what we refer to as the SSA. The third element is the history and trend data of the FCPS operating budget and the fourth item is the history and trend data of the tuition bill and the cost per pupil and then the final and fifth one is the city membership enrollment and not only the September 30th but also what's called the average daily membership or ADM which is March 31st and that's what's used for state reporting and funding.

[00:02:28] As I said, this slide depicts the components that we're going to be speaking of that make up the Fairfax City Schools budget. They include the operational costs, the tuition expenses, the debt service of outstanding school bond obligations, also some capital lease expenses and also expenses still for Katherine Johnson and Fairfax High School, improvement of the annual contribution for turf replacement, and the capital improvement program for our four buildings.

[00:02:56] We're going to be spending the majority of tonight's conversation on the discussion of the SSA, which is the tuition expenses, as it makes up over 90% of our budget, and with the existing debt comprising 5%, the CIP just over 2%, and the admin fee 1.5%, the other capital turf less than two-tenths of a percent.

[00:03:17] A little background on the school services agreement. It was originally executed in the early 60s in 1962 and ratified in 1978. It's the driver. It's a four-way agreement between Fairfax County, the City of Fairfax Council, the Fairfax County School Board, and the City of Fairfax School Board.

[00:03:39] And we're going to go ahead and discuss in detail the tuition really agreement and also the SSA. But I'd be remiss without talking about the school services agreement and the incredible value that it provides for the City of Fairfax students. If you take a look at what's presented here, it represents just a smattering of a lot of the extensive programs and supports, the social-emotional, the language opportunities our students have here in the city.

[00:04:05] The AVID programs, special programs that provide closing of opportunity gaps and preparing all students for college and career readiness and successes. The athletics, the arts and things that would be challenging at best for us to provide had we not had the SSA in place. These are the current county operating costs, rather, over time that are included in their annual state report, and they're a driver for our tuition bill. Historically, you can see, thank you, I didn't know how to get that red dot open. It's always good to have support. Anyway,

[00:04:44] historically, you can see the increases of 31 million, 50 million, and then you'll see 80 million to \$100 million. And then it jumps up to around \$200 million, and now \$300 million increase for the budget in FY25 that's not shown on here, the current fiscal year that we're in. And we review constantly all of these operating costs, but we also look at their approved budget, their year-end budget, and respectively any of the quarterly improvements during the school year and their carryover from the prior year, which really had kicked off the acceleration that I hadn't

[00:05:21] anticipated certainly in 2024, but it was something that really generated a whole big jump that we'll get to in just a minute. But you can see the significant increases over time. This chart reflects the cost

per pupil for the city over time and our tuition history, which reflects the correlation to the FCPS operating budget that I showed on the previous slide. From approximately FY 2011 to FY 2023, or the 10-year average, was 3.81%. In FY 24, it went from the prior year 4.7%

[00:05:58] increase to a historic 13.71. When I say I talk about the year end that we didn't account for in FY 24, that type of increase of 13.71%, I know a few of you are familiar with that because we had deep conversations about it, was really eye-opening and quite a shock because, as I said, it was historical. And now we're expecting an 8.25% increase. So you can see the increasing trend, which correlates the increasing trend from the operating expenditures that I had shown

[00:06:33] previously. This slide reflects the cost per pupil, which reflects where we've been over time and shows the city currently is the fifth lowest cost per pupil and significant less than the City of Falls Church, which is one of our good comparators that we do. A lot of people ask, why do we use Falls Church? Well, they have actually less student enrollment than the city does, but they're a self-supporting or self-operating instructional program that they provide for their students. And as you can see, it's over \$3,000 per student per year. That's currently. Now, that will change because of what we said about the incredible increases that we're

[00:07:09] seeing in not only our operating costs, but also our enrollment. And speaking of enrollment, membership plays an important role in both the primary and secondary factors, which we'll show in a minute. We'll show the city enrollment trends as well. So if you look at this, now this is the September 30th, 2024 data that we show. Our city enrollment totaled 2,992 city of Fairfax students that are enrolled in our schools.

[00:07:40] That is up from last year at this time of 2,922. It's kind of an odd-looking difference, the 2,922 to 2,992, but that's the difference in the increase that we have from the prior year. Each year, we take a look at our opening school enrollment data on September 30th, again, which is different than the average daily membership or ADM that I mentioned that's polled March 31st with adjustments, and that's what's used for the state calculation for funding for all localities across the Commonwealth of Virginia. As I stated earlier, we've seen an increase in membership, and this

[00:08:16] slide depicts the ADM, or average data membership, as of March each year over a trend of years. There are a number of reasons for this growth, and you all are familiar very well with them. They include growth from new development. We also have transfers in and transfers out during the school year that would affect this and additional special education reported data of student needs and growth and services provided in our schools the dates for student membership projections and official budget counts as I said are March 31st and the reason why they are past September 30th as I mentioned there are a number of different reasons but preschool data isn't added to it until

[00:08:55] December 1st and the FCPS pre-k is done in in March as well but again the ADM is just one component of the formula for our tuition bill. This slide shows the difference between the September 30th and the ADM. So you get kind of a balancing act of seeing, well, where are we in comparison when you take a look at the September 30th enrollment, those adjustments that occur, the calculations and the formula that the Commonwealth requires us to account for, and then what the resultant ADM reflect. You can see it's getting closer and closer to our September 30th enrollment, and our September 30th enrollment we think is

[00:09:35] trending up and growing. And in comparison to Fairfax County Public Schools, their growth has been relatively flat, where ours has not. Ours has been considerable. Now we're going to go ahead and discuss the 2026 school board budget. And the detail of these budget forecasts include two primary factors and secondary factors, two factors that impact the tuition bill. The detail are shown here, which articulate the complexities associated with forecasting, really a budget that we prepare in December. Here we are speaking to you on the 4th of March, but we actually prepare

[00:10:12] our budget and start amassing the information, as I mentioned, throughout the year, prior year, fiscal year, year-end data, what FCPS may be indicating, because we put our preview budget together before they've even presented their proposed budget, and so forth, and the timeline associated with that, which is pretty challenging at best.

[00:10:34] So when you take a look at some of these different factors, they're pretty self-articulate. I mentioned the \$300 million per year. One of the things that impacts us and impacts their operating budget greatly is when they take a look at salary increases. With collective bargaining, it's added an additional challenge for not only their salaries, but also their health care providers.

[00:10:56] The ADM is another component. historical trends and fluctuations or things that we look at as well and the secondary factors the ADM as a percent of the total school enrollment for Fairfax County and then taking a look at something we get that's called classroom rental which is the number of county students that are attending our schools as well it's important to note that each student level is calculated separately the elementary middle and high or the elementary and secondary and the reason being is the higher cost of the elementary education is primarily driven by ratio-based staffing formulas that require a greater number of teachers per student

[00:11:34] and also a higher allocation of specialized support staff to address the unique needs of younger students. The lower cost of middle and high school education is driven by a combination of factors, most notably the teacher load-based staffing formulas and the lower ratios of specialized support staff relative to the elementary schools. So really the bottom line, or in short, The FCPS spends more per pupil on pre-K education than on grades 7 through 12, and that's reflected in our tuition bill.

[00:12:02] So how do we get here? Well, when we take a look at this, there are multiple factors that go into the tuition number. And really, on average, we've been, and this is really, I think, a pretty good graphical representation of that statement. Approximately 1.7% of FCPS's operating budget is what our tuition bill usually is.

[00:12:22] Historically, it had been approximately 1.6%, but it's up significantly. There are a number of different things. The multi-year investments that are mentioned here, such as pre-K expansion and so on. The salary increases that FCPS does.

[00:12:38] Ongoing needs, such as rising health care costs that I alluded to in student services. And required adjustments, such as either state mandates. And one example, one that Mr. Martinez and I have been watching closely, is the forecast of a 1% bonus. that the state usually provides.

[00:12:58] Absolutely. Okay, so just so everybody understands what the 1.7% is, that's the percentage of the overall FCPS population that we represent. So that is why we are responsible for 1.7% of their operating budget because that is what our student population represents.

[00:13:17] So just to make that connection. Thank you for that clarification and comment. And in taking a look at that, it's one thing that we look at over time. We look at historically what percent of enrollment, what percent of ADM, what percent. All of this data is audited each year by the City of Fairfax finance staff.

[00:13:37] We also this year performed an enrollment audit to make sure that they weren't charging us for county students that represent city students. So we were constantly looking at and auditing. And prior to that, we had an outside group helping us and assisting us in our forecast and projections.

[00:13:54] But because of all these increases, because of the significant impact, because of the FY24 impact, we've pretty much mandated and new financial measures that have been put in place by the finance team of preparing a budget collaboratively. We've been analyzing and taking a look at this collectively together in preparation of our budgets.

[00:14:16] So anyway, great point. Thank you so much, Chairman Pitches. So by the numbers, another graphical representation of the numbers. I mentioned being impacted by the collective bargaining and 7% salary increase. And there are other expenditure categories that I mentioned.

[00:14:33] The food service enhancements in the health care, transportation, and also that 7% increase are considered their collective bargaining salaries and benefits, if you will. And that is FCPS's increased projection of \$240 million. The required adjustments that they state, the student needs, enrollment changes, primarily special education increases. Retirement rate changes and contractual rate changes and insurances, ones that they consider are required adjustments on that prior chart that was part of that graphic, represent 46.2 million of their increase. And then ongoing needs, their substitute

[00:15:11] incentive test fees, online campus, cybersecurity and the like, and multilingual instructional services are about 48 million. And then what they call, FCPS calls multi-year investments, which are HR infrastructure technology, certified athletic training, expansion in the fine arts, and what they term inclusive preschool, which is the expansion of pre-K, for an additional \$4 million.

[00:15:37] So as mentioned previously, the tuition amount has increased considerably. In fact, it's been historical increases from the FY 2024 that I mentioned upon the increase of the City of Fairfax enrollment as well, significant increases predominantly in the FCPS operating budget.

[00:15:54] Our tuition bill before classroom rental was, in FY24, \$60,955,083, \$61 million basically, well over what was budgeted. Due to these rather significant and unplanned increases, as I mentioned again, our partnership, we implemented a process of working collaboratively and closely with the City of Fairfax Chief Financial Officer and Budget Director.

[00:16:19] In doing so, we were able to find the significant and fund the significant difference for what was that historical 13.71% increase in 2024, and thanks to the Council's support for that. Additionally, the FY26 proposed is over \$12 million from the FY25 adopted.

[00:16:37] Keep in mind what I mentioned about the budget that's prepared in December, a year prior. It's a direct result of budgeting way in advance for the prior year actuals, which come in August of the following year. That's why we've been monitoring closer than ever before and working more collaboratively than ever had been done in the past.

[00:16:58] I can't stress enough about the development and the budget working close partnership with Ms. Riddle and Mr. Martinez and their staff. It really has been challenging, but it's been really a very

transparent and open process.

[00:17:16] We continue to monitor the FCPS budget and review their expenditures as well. And so for an FY26, we've collectively agreed that an increase of 8.25% on the current forecasted amount, which is a revision from the FY25 budgeted amount, especially with the 7%, All of the different components that I mentioned that FCPS has in their budget is why we've come together with our proposed budget amount.

[00:17:46] And again, this doesn't account for the classroom rental, which is accounted for in revenue but not in expense prior to the actual tuition bill coming here. Classroom revenues, however, are growing much smaller than the tuition bill in relation to it. So a local funding effort, what does this mean to the city of Fairfax?

[00:18:04] Historically, in FY24, it was approximately 35% of the general fund that was dispersed to schools. Based upon what you've heard this evening and what we are anticipating, I do believe that it is going to continue to, that actual amount of contribution is going to increase considerably.

[00:18:24] And in fact, the 26 does reflect that, the FY26 budget for schools. So here we have our timeline that reflects our being very early, as I mentioned in the terms of the budget season, especially when the state budget is usually wrapped up around March, at the end of March. And FCPS presents their budget, as I said, at the beginning of January.

[00:18:44] They will be wrapping theirs up there and kind of in the shock and awe right now with working with their counterparts in the county on their funding. They've proposed a lot of cuts that we are very concerned about. The school board has asked us to investigate much further.

[00:19:02] In fact, to ask the finance staff to come and present to us from FCPS. They've committed that they will be doing so, but they said right now it's premature because they don't know what the actual ultimate impact will be. On the surface, the impacts are rather draconian.

[00:19:20] When you look at Fairfax County proposing a cut of the after-school programs, for example, We have an incredible after-school program. Our students need it. Our community is expected. It's a very, very solid, robust program. That's just one of many.

[00:19:36] One of the other recommendations would be a huge loss in revenue, a considerable loss in revenue would be if there were to be a change in qualifying for freedom to reduce lunch from 40% to 60% and so on. That's just some of the cuts, but they will be keeping us informed because our board has demanded that we be kept informed of these incredible and challenging times.

[00:20:01] So, Madam Mayor, members of the City Council, this concludes my presentation. And, Madam Chair, if you have any concluding remarks. I just think it's important for everybody to know that we are trying to work with Fairfax County.

[00:20:18] Catherine and I, originally I had met with Carl sort of casually to talk about these challenges, and then Catherine and I met with him formally, requesting that we kind of put our heads together and we really figure out what we can do to attack this issue.

[00:20:41] Because this is not, we cannot, as we told FCPS, we cannot, this is not tenable. We cannot year over year take on an 8% plus increase in our tuition costs. So we've been sort of trying to work with them, and we have a meeting scheduled for the 28th of this month.

[00:21:05] Both superintendents, Catherine and I, their school board chair, Carl Frisch, Mr. Martinez is going to come. I think Gwen's going to come, and Lee Burton from FCPS. So we're hoping to present some options.

[00:21:20] I have a few I have a list of four that I think would that I feel are fair we'll see what you know what the conversation is but we'll keep you all sort of updated on on that conversation Catherine will be there so I'm sure you you have a conversation with council but we want you all to know that we understand that this is difficult on our taxpayers this is difficult on all of us as elected officials and that we're you know we're really working hard to see if we

[00:21:57] can come up with some sort of compromise with the county well let me just iterate the point you made earlier we're 1.7 percent of their budget because our enrollment is 1.7 percent of the counties they are huge compared to us and yet our fates are tied together and our fates have been tied together for decades and so the fact that they're willing to meet with us is an important indicator that they want this to continue to work for the city of Fairfax and they want to support us and we want

[00:22:31] a partnership that works for us they are staggering obviously under the burden of these school increases as well so I don't know what that will bring but they are willing to sit down and at least explore and talk with us about what might be possible moving forward and so I'm you know I'm very hopeful it all starts with a conversation at this point I will open it up and ask if we've got questions from the dais uh for the school board uh council member hardy chandler thank you for that presentation and um i it might be premature but i'm just wondering if you're willing to

[00:23:08] provide a general overview of your four ideas because certainly we would want to start to think about how we can support or explore or if there is something that you feel comfortable previewing if it's not too premature no i'm happy to so typically um we uh there's a three to five percent somewhere in that range increase um i think the average is

[00:23:37] 3.77 percent um we one option the best option i think for the city is to ask them to cap an increase say five to five and a half percent uh that anything beyond that we would not be responsible for considering the size of our jurisdiction and our tax base we don't have what they have a second option would to ask them to cap it for the duration of the renovations that actually would buy us time because we

[00:24:14] would they would end up with it by the time we finish there'll be a new school board as well and then another option is to there is his precedent for a superintendent to superintendent addendum to the contract without opening the full contract originally uh we originally when the contract was um first put into place there we did not receive classroom rental that only came about between superintendent mr george step and um daniel dominich uh after the renovations the first round so there is the option possibly to do something

[00:24:54] similar where we ask for an increase in the classroom rental because they have more students now in our schools we're going to go through yet another renovation the academy is almost 600 people I think larger than it when it was um first opened so that's a possibility and of course the the least or the option that doesn't really bring us much yield is to ask to pay the exact same tuition as they do but that's that's not going to get us to where we

[00:25:28] need to be so that's sort of like a top-down just some ideas councilmember Amos I just want to say thank you and definitely echo your sentiments about this being unsustainable and I've talked about it

before so I'm not going to go all into it I sent my budget questions early so we can get out of here early but anyway so if my understanding is correct FY 27 is also expected to be roughly 8% if that's right. So let's assume the worst case scenario and we don't

[00:26:04] get to a solution this time around. Is there any forecasting that this will slow down at all or stabilize? No, Council Member, I want to thank you for that question. But the current trending, when you see the graphs that spike and then expand and contract, you can see that the trend is going upward. And as I caution with the collective bargaining and the broader impacts with that, it really has created a more challenging environment where normally I would say you were going to have your ebb and your flow. You're going to have ebb and tide, and you could see it by the

[00:26:42] graphs of the charts. Because of that nuance, I think that it's going to be a continuous upward trend. But I think everybody is looking at how can we sustain these challenging requirements if we're truly going to have a partnership together. So the long answer is, I don't see it as going away anytime soon. No, I appreciate your candor on that. And it's just, I don't like operating from a position of limited negotiating power. And, you know, unfortunately, that's where we find ourselves. So I just want to acknowledge that unpredictability has a cost too. And I think

[00:27:22] We saw that more recently between the projected and the adopted budget for FY25, so we need to get something done, and I appreciate the options you set forth. I think setting a cap makes sense to not exceed, but we need some kind of backup plan. Councilmember Hall, thank you for the presentation.

[00:27:44] A couple questions, I think more just maybe clarification for those that are listening at home. Can you explain the classroom rental a little bit more as far as how that number comes around? is it per pupil is it per seat without getting too far into the contract and then when it comes to infrastructure replacement and upgrades do our taxpayers pay for things that are done at their buildings when they build new schools those kinds of things and finally sorry I'll just get them all out there as a global statement and I don't look at you specifically Mr. Martinez I know it's not your decision but I think this is yet another example of why our budget cycle our timeline

[00:28:23] is really at a disadvantage when it comes to our schools which is such a huge portion of our budget I think we're working on estimates on estimates I know I've said this before but this is just another example of now our corrected estimate is much higher than what it was and we don't have all the information it's very very hard to make decisions with estimates of this enormity so I'll let you talk um thank you councilmember Hall yeah the and I know you're you're accounting background you're going to want to know the details so i'm going to have to follow up with the exact formula it's a formulaic approach about the percent of county students

[00:29:01] versus city students and that ratio difference of the number of county students is what derives that actual amount that's why the statement about it being not a comparator and not really covering the the full load if you will of the impact for example there are 1400 students that attend the Academy that are bused in each and every day to Fairfax High School. That's a good situation because it allows for a lot of programming, a lot of teachers and so forth, but it also is wear and tear on our buildings. And then the second question was about whether or not we have

[00:29:38] to pay any of the freight for any of the renovations, and the answer is no. City of Fairfax does not pay for Fairfax County Public Schools renovations in their buildings. Thank you. I just want to make everyone listening was able to understand that so thank you. Council Member Hardy Chandler. So is the

8.25 percent that's forecasted is that conservative or could there possibly be an expansion from there since it is a forecast? I keep looking over at Mr. Martinez for that one

[00:30:14] because it is a joint forecast that we believe is conservative but I'll let him speak to that he is more qualified than I sure thank you so the eight and a quarter percent is a conservative forecast I think in discussions that we've had with FCPS the superintendent myself previously they were looking at about on potentially anywhere a range between seven to about nine percent so we sort of cut it in the middle just a slightly more above that at eight and a quarter with more time PASSING AS FY 26 STARTS DEVELOPING WE ACTUALLY GET OUR TRUE UP BILL

[00:30:54] AT THE END OF AUGUST OF OCTOBER TIMEFRAME OF THIS CURRENT CALENDAR YEAR THEN WE CAN REVISE THAT ESTIMATE IF NEED BE EITHER UP OR DOWN HOPEFULLY DOWN AND THEN COME BACK TO COUNCIL WITH UPDATED PROJECTIONS IN COLLABORATION WITH THE SUPERINTENDENT AND THE SCHOOL BOARD AS WELL. COUNCIL MEMBER PETERSON. THANK YOU. TWO QUESTIONS. ONE, IF YOU You could just, again, restate what is driving, at least primarily, these increases in tuition costs.

[00:31:28] And second, how does that compare? How does that benchmark, not just in this region, but statewide, against changes in tuition costs elsewhere? Well, the second question is an excellent question because I don't have the data to reflect what that impact is.

[00:31:49] I do know from my superintendent colleagues that collective bargaining has really had a huge impact across the commonwealth not only in this region but in southwest Virginia as well in regards to and the other question was what are the actual components that are included in it as I mentioned the terms that are used were that they were stabilization components that were a part of their Fairfax County Public Schools budget that specifically impacted and some of which

[00:32:25] that they referred to were the required adjustments the technical terms that they used were multi-year investments required adjustments ongoing needs right and then salary increases so if you take a look at the the 240 million thank you madam chair the 240 million of that impact right I was talking about 300 million a year is what they're now proposing each year but 240 million of that impact was 7% compensation increases, transportation and food service enhancements.

[00:33:02] Those are salary enhancements because each of those collective bargaining components groups are considered the individual elements. And then health care increases of over 10% comprise that \$240 million. The term required adjustments are student needs and enrollment changes.

[00:33:23] And the statement is primarily special education service increases. retirement rate changes, and contractual rate increases, like insurance premiums and the like, and for service providers that provide service to the students of Fairfax County where services can't be provided.

[00:33:41] Those increases as well. They consider those required adjustments that are non-negotiable. Ongoing needs is a term that I'm trying to understand myself, Because an ongoing need, when somebody says no new initiatives, it's the continuation of the substitute incentive, the test fees, the online campus, cybersecurity, the middle school late buses, the safety and security, major maintenance, planning time, legal fees, summer school, inclusive practices, and the multilingual instructional initiatives.

[00:34:17] Those ongoing needs are programs that had already started. So it's not, and I don't mean to diminish it anyway, but it's not to say we're going to stop or legal fees. I don't know that they can put a

control on that, to be honest with you.

[00:34:33] We're going to go ahead and stop these initiatives that the board has already approved, whether it's summer school or safety enhancements and so on. And then the last one was the multi-year investments. A multi-year investment, when I talk about pre-K expansion.

[00:34:49] SCPS has been in the process of expanding early childhood and pre-K offerings that they refer to as inclusive preschool beyond those that were for qualified families. So it's to provide it to the community as a whole, much like full-day kindergarten was when it came out.

[00:35:07] So the expansion of that program is not saying, well, we're going to stop for now and then we'll implement it. It's really a multi-year investment that they're going to continue investing in if they get the funding. Now, this is what was included in the budget. As I said, it's early on.

[00:35:26] We don't know where not only the state is going to be but where Fairfax County is going to be because Fairfax County gave Fairfax County Public Schools a pretty good indicator when they underfunded them by \$128 million, something of that magnitude.

[00:35:43] So it really says, you know, you're going to have to sharpen your pencil, folks, and go ahead and see if there are any other additional savings that you can have. But I will tell you that these programs are community commitments, and it'll be an interesting budgetary process, much like they all are.

[00:36:03] Thank you. Really helpful. When you look at the entire bucket of drivers' increased costs, there's a set that are permanent structural changes, it sounds like, and a set that are either one-time or some-time adjustment, kind of a catch-up or a reset or something.

[00:36:25] What's your feel for how much of this, and this goes to the growth rate issue and what's driving it, how much of this is something that's a permanent built-in rate of increase and how much of it is just a periodic thing that's going to be over for the time being? That's an excellent question. When I look at that, Council Member Peterson, it is predominantly an ongoing, when you talk about salary increases, which was the \$240 million, and benefits, basically, when you talk about that increase, that becomes a new plateau, a new level that's built upon.

[00:36:58] So, to me, they all become systemic and part of the overall operation, and it continues to grow. The biggest thing, and when I talk to the CFO for Fairfax County Public Schools, and I say to Ms. Burden, how are you going to be able to address a recession, these difficult times, the challenges people face?

[00:37:23] And she, quite frankly, has stated to me, the only way we can do it is when you look at staffing, because the human resource component is the largest portion of our budget, whether that's pupil-teacher ratio, whether it's programs. She goes, I don't know. But when people ask me, you can work around the margins, and we've done that, the majority of any significant impact would have to come by way of people.

[00:37:47] Well, and maybe just to ask, it does not sound like the salary increases are indexed to economy. No, it does not necessarily.

[00:38:04] And it sounds like, if I heard it right, that the annual rate of increase has hiked up and that will continue at some higher level as opposed to we made an adjustment to bump it up, but from there forward, the annual rate of increase will not be quite so high.

[00:38:21] Did I read that right? I can't speculate on what I think those increases are going to be. I just don't believe it's tenable. I think this is what you're saying as well. I'm sorry.

[00:38:37] I agree with you. I don't know what to say about that. The problem is that the county is having a very difficult time keeping teachers because the surrounding counties are outpaying. The salaries are much bigger if you go teach in Arlington, even Loudon now.

[00:38:58] Prince William has come up pretty close on Fairfax County. So that's, I mean, that's just the way things are. They have a huge amount of teaching staff that they have to pay and if they the collective bargaining if they get the seven percent that's not going anywhere they're not going to end up with a decrease in pay and typically teachers I would say what three percent

[00:39:32] is is the typical um raise but that's why we 240 million dollars that's more than the operating costs have gone up. Yeah, very long time. So I don't suspect that it's going to, you know, that there's going to be a downturn. Well, I'm sorry to ask so many questions. This will be my last for the moment. But back to the earlier point about benchmarking with other jurisdictions, those who are competing, and I gather successfully, by paying more, are they not experiencing a

[00:40:10] similar escalation and similar challenges, and would that not cap that competition? Your first point is absolutely spot on, and that's what I mentioned. The region superintendents, we meet and discuss this. We are all struggling with how to address the increase in health care costs and also the salary.

[00:40:30] The competition, as Chairman Pitch has mentioned, has become something that in our region has been extremely challenging. And one of the things we talk about each year prior to the budget is what percent are you looking at? What is your salary increase?

[00:40:47] And we don't just talk about salary increase in terms of market scale or cost of living adjustment. We also talk in terms of step. And then we also go into a lot more detail about what kind of health impact on the health care costs, because those two are two big elements that impact all of us as superintendents.

[00:41:08] And that's in terms of benchmarking when we were talking about that, that leveling and competition. It's one of those things that I don't really, I see it as a huge challenge. I don't really see a way forward yet. But again, these are proposed budgets that we'll have to continue to monitor to see exactly how this plays out.

[00:41:30] because I know there's concern by all the financial members that are reeling and dealing with this as well as the superintendents as to how can we address these needs that are competing with each other while still providing the services our community expects.

[00:41:48] Other questions from the dais? Anything? So I have a couple questions. Can I ask about school lunches? Do our schools have school lunch debt that we carry?

[00:42:07] Yes, we do. all the schools I don't know I don't know yeah they do so let's and what the city that carries it the county does carry because a local business asked me about school lunch debt sure and so what happens is it varies between school to school and I know when I used to work at FCPS there were some schools that had a larger debt that they were carrying than others the practices had changed over time on how to deal with that debt. No longer can't graduate and things of that nature that

[00:42:44] were kind of draconian back in their day. And that's handled through food service, which is also, it's looked at as a total component at year end to see the pluses and the minuses and see where they are and to work with the schools and to try and collect that debt throughout the school year in a very soft

approach. Well, like I said, a local business spoke to me just yesterday about the fact that they were interested in figuring out how to help retire school lunch debt in the city schools and I don't even know that that is something we can do where there's an avenue to even do that. We could, yeah, please

[00:43:24] let me know that individual's name and I can talk to them and work with them. I'll make that connection and, you know, I know that Delegate Danica Rome has done a lot on school lunches. She's the one, I think we had to pass legislation to keep stickers from being put on kids about their lunch debt, which was kind of crazy, but, you know, progress progress um but the but aren't some of the funds and this is why we have to look at state funds and federal funds too because you know the state stopped funding a lot of our education programs back during the recession of 2008 like lots of cutbacks were made in richmond

[00:44:03] and everybody adapted and then the economy changed but the money didn't come back right So for a very long time, for a very long time, we have been underfunded by the state, right? Yes. Right. So that's part of it that we need to keep in mind is that we're trying to figure out how to do something with our budget to pay for our school bill, but the county's also struggling.

[00:44:25] And all of this is a much bigger conversation. You know, we have a billion dollar surplus. You know, we have to figure out how to deal with our surplus. And yet, you know, we've got localities that can't pay their tuition bills or fund their schools. So that's one thing, is looking at the fact that I understand we have the administration that we have, but, you know, that lasts for four years, and then we have something else.

[00:44:49] And so that's coming up. And that impacts the 1% too, because it looks like we will not get the option for a 1% sales tax under this administration, but things change. So that's hanging out there as a solution, talking about state funding, getting state investment in our public K-12 education needs to change.

[00:45:08] Hopefully that will also change with a different administration. But what about funding for free and reduced lunch? Is that a USDA program? Do USDA programs fund free and reduced lunch? Where does that money come from? Yeah, their USDA programs fund some of the commodities that come with it.

[00:45:29] But one thing you mentioned, the JLARC study identified that school districts across the commonwealth were way underfunded and that burden was placed on the locality yes it did and then nothing happened i'm you know so people need to keep in mind that that's in a representative form of government you have to hold your representatives kind of accountable for things like having a study that tells you something and then your representatives don't do it um but i'm just looking at anything federal because i don't think we get a lot of federal money that i'm aware

[00:46:03] of, except maybe some special education programs. But I do wonder about any kind of federal money that could disappear. I guess my question is, we're in kind of a bad situation. Could that bad situation get worse if federal funds are simply removed out of what we are allocating as part of our budget? Simply put, yes. And it's significant. And Lee and I, the CFO for FCPS and I have talked about that it would be significant if not only federal funds but also grants that are federally

[00:46:37] funded because there are not only positions but programs that are very important for students that would impact all of us yes and see that's something so we're struggling to pay what we think we know it's going to be moving forward we're forecasting what we think the expenses are going to be and there's no

way really until it happens to understand what cuts in federal funding could mean for us struggling to pay a forecasted budget so i just everybody needs to be aware we can do it we can do our best and we can work with the county but all of us are in the same boat all across the commonwealth of virginia in trying to figure out what monies we have what monies we're going to

[00:47:16] have and what things could end up source resources drying up and then we have to decide what we're going to do about some of these things whether we just cut the program which i can't imagine that we're going to be able to do, or where else we look to keep programs going when there just aren't funds for them. You know, it's just, this is real, and I don't think it's necessarily feeling very real for people right this minute, starting the third month of a new way of looking at education federally. But I think we all have to be realistic that this budget that's been

[00:47:54] presented to us has been very thoughtful. I know that Mr. Martinez, everyone's done their best to try to figure it out but i think we have to be realistic about the fact that it could be far worse as far as cuts and resources to these programs so if if no one else has any questions i i yes council member mcquillen um what neighboring municipalities have a similar school services agreement as ours no none in the commonwealth and what um previously when we were

[00:48:32] forecasting and doing your budget what safeguards or what can contingencies were in place in the event that there was an economic downturn that might be a question for mr. Martinez I don't know so council member about six years ago that council at that time actually put into place via financial policy something called a budget stabilization fund also known as the BSF we actually funded that for the first time at the end of fiscal year 2024 there

[00:49:08] are four or five items or ways to utilize the budget stabilization fund one is actually for a increase in the tuition contract the school's tuition contract that would be allowed to tap into that we are projecting potentially for FY25 to utilize the budget stabilization fund to offset some of these projected increases in the tuition contract so that is something that the city in collaboration with the school board along with the council as well who created this policy and has now been funded to utilize in a way to offset

[00:49:46] those expense expenditures sure and what currently is the balance of our budget stabilization fund going into FY 26 I'm gonna go off of memory here but I want to say it is 4.3 million dollars or so which sounds significant but but once you use it it's gone correct and then there ain't no more until fyi 27 okay actually right so um potentially i mean a lot of things can happen but it just makes it very difficult to try to get something together

[00:50:22] and you plan and you and you're calculating with what you think you have but we don't really no I think every effort from what I'm hearing has been made to come up with a good realistic budget for the schools and and to absorb that into the budget discussions we're having for the city any other comments that we have before we thank the school board for coming and talking with us this evening council member hall just quickly for those that are watching at home please come check out your school board meetings council I encourage you to go check out your school board

[00:51:01] meetings not just the meetings but the work sessions valuable things are discussed I know I've been getting a lot of questions from residents in the community about the budget about the school budget about the budget in general I'm happy to answer any questions on the school budget but I would strongly recommend that you reach out to your school board members that's what they're here for I am definitely not an expert on the past three months I probably wasn't an expert on it for the two years before that but

we have experts just for that so please reach out to them see their meetings email them contact them do all the things that will you know help you sleep at night and help you make good choices when it comes to recognizing that we're all doing the best we can

[00:51:38] here especially given what we're going on in the current environment so thank you thank you very much i echo the fact that we're very transparent here in the city and so if you want to know what's going on there's many opportunities so thank you very much miss casey our next item is the discussion on the Q transit development plan. Wendy Sanford, Transportation Director, will

[00:52:03] provide the staff presentation. Good evening, Mayor, members of the City Council. Tonight we

[00:52:45] are here to discuss Q. We are here to give an overview of the Q transit system as an introduction really to our transit development plan, which is a long-range planning tool for the bus system. Before we get started, let me introduce the team. First on our city staff, we have Chloe Ritter, our multimodal planner. We have Charles Kudz, Jr., who's the general manager of our Q system.

[00:53:09] David Summers, our public works director. And last but not least, we have Lucas Muller with Kim Lee Horn, who is our consultant, who is the lead on our TDP. So first, in terms of our objectives for tonight, it is to provide background about the Q bus system, discuss the purpose of a TDP, a transit development plan, present our draft goals, and discuss just some initial analysis.

[00:53:35] Really, we have just kicked off this project. We've done some public engagement, and we're going to have some preliminary recommendations in a few months, but we didn't want to come to you at that point without first introducing the project. So tonight really is an introduction of the project, an opportunity for some preliminary input, an opportunity for us to share with you what we're doing and some of the input we've received thus far.

[00:54:00] And we have some questions for you at the end, and we'll discuss the schedule and next steps. First, by way, I'm going to do a few slides just about some brief background about Q. First, a little quiz. Does anyone know what Q used to stand for?

[00:54:19] City University Exchange? Energy Saver. Energy Saver, okay. It's somewhat of a moot point because we have now done a rebranding, and we are now City, period, University, period, everyone. Everyone. Right. Everyone. But until just about a couple of years ago, that was what Q stood for.

[00:54:38] There are four routes, two gold routes, two green routes, and a map of our system is up on the screen. We operate seven days a week. During weekdays, we have 30-minute headways, and on the weekends, we operate every hour. We have a fleet of 12 buses. We require eight of them to operate our peak service.

[00:54:56] And in terms of our staff, we have about 35 staff. We have 22 full-time bus operators, 15 part-time operators, two supervisors, and one general manager, Mr. Koontz. And our Q office and our bus storage area is down at the property yard. Just to give a little context about Q, we are one of many transit providers in Northern Virginia.

[00:55:19] This map shows the city of Fairfax. It shows the Q routes. It also shows the metro bus routes that serve the area, as well as the Fairfax connector bus routes. Just in general, in Northern Virginia, it's somewhat unique. There are a number of transit providers.

[00:55:36] There's ART in Arlington. There's DASH in the city of Alexandria. There's us. There's PRTC. There's Loudoun County Transit. There's a lot of transit in Northern Virginia. But the idea is for us to be seamless to the user. And it's something that is a challenge, and it's something that we all work on together.

[00:55:54] In terms of ridership, what the chart shows here is 2019 through 2023. But the data on the side goes back all the way to FY13. But what I'm trying to show you is that we had high ridership, it really went down, and now we're back up.

[00:56:11] All the bus providers were seeing very low ridership during COVID. And what we're seeing is that not only have we recovered to the point where we were before COVID, we have exceeded that. We're up to about a million rides a year. In terms of ridership hotspots, what you see on the map is a heat map.

[00:56:31] And so when it shows where you see red is where we have more higher boarding activity, and so clearly you can see the two highest spots of boardings are at George Mason University and at the Vienna Metro Rail Station, and then other areas of high boardings are near our activity centers as expected.

[00:56:50] In terms of our budget, what is Q cost and where does our money come from? We have an approximate \$5.8 million cost to run the bus system. About half of that is salaries and fringe. \$2 million is internal services. And what internal services are really our fleet maintenance costs and then a management fee that Q pays to the city for other services like HR, information technology, and so on. The remainder is training, uniforms, insurance, and other fees that we pay. And then how do we pay for that? And that's what's shown on the right side of the screen. About \$927,000

[00:57:29] comes from Mason. That was in FY25. In 26, that is going to be increasing to \$950,000. A portion comes from state funding. I'll come back to that in a minute. The majority comes from 30% transportation revenues. That's that NVTa money that we've talked about that comes back to us from the NVTa. We utilize that funding to pay for Q operating. In terms of state funding, the city receives assistance from the Department of Rail and Public Transportation, which is the sister agency to VDOT in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

[00:58:04] So in Virginia, you have VDOT, which is roads, and then you have DRPT, which is transit. They're both state agencies. We receive funding from DRPT to help offset our bills for both Metro. We support Metro for both operating and capital.

[00:58:20] And they also provide assistance to us for our local operating and capital needs. All of that money that we receive is held in trust at the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission, NVTC, and we use that money primarily to pay our metro bills. We choose to transfer some of that to assist us with Q. So that 728 that you see in state funding here, that is money that we transfer from our NVTC trust fund to offset our Q costs. That is not the total of what we receive in state assistance. I just want to be clear about that. That is what we choose to transfer to ourselves to pay for queue operating.

[00:59:02] Constrained resources. What we're showing here is this blue line and what that shows is our revenue hours. And what that means is those are the hours that we operate the bus system. And we could go back even before 2019, that line would still be flat going all the way back.

[00:59:18] We have maintained the same service levels, really, since this bus system started in 1980, minor fluctuations. But what we do see is that even with that same constant level of service that our costs go up. and that's the same that we're seeing really everywhere. We just had a conversation about schools.

[00:59:33] It's primarily due to our salary costs and just fuel costs, all of those costs going up to operate the same bus system. So we recognize that we have constrained resources. In terms of recent improvements, again, even though our services primarily stayed the same, we've made some really nice upgrades to the system over the past few years.

[00:59:55] As I mentioned a few minutes ago, we updated our logo and our branding. You might have seen our new wrapped buses traveling around the city. We also have some improved bus stop amenities. We've added these little blue seats that you see in the bottom right-hand corner. They're called semi-seats. They take up a much smaller footprint than a regular bench.

[01:00:15] They can also fit around a bus stop pole. So they're a way to provide seating when we don't have as much space. We have done those at 17 stops. At 23 stops, we've added some solar-powered lights. And you can see the photos. They're very small lights. And the idea is if you're standing at the pole, it helps illuminate the passenger for safety reasons, and also it helps them to be seen by the bus driver.

[01:00:36] We've also installed some solar-powered real-time signs, some new bus shelters. We have a new real-time data provider, so that's if you have your phone. You can pull up. It's GPS-based. It can tell you when the next bus is coming. And we've also taken a bigger effort to expand our marketing and communications for the bus system.

[01:00:59] So that's just some very, very brief background about our bus system. And now we're going to transition to Mr. Mueller, who's going to talk to us about what a TDP is, why it's useful, and what we're doing here to plan for Q's future. All right.

[01:01:14] Thank you, and good evening. As Ms. Sanford mentioned, my name is Lucas Mueller with Kim Lee Horn. I'm the consultant team project manager for this effort. And I've been working with transit agencies around Virginia, around northern Virginia for the past 14 years or so, excited to tackle this with you all and it's really a great time to jump into this. Really an opportunity to define what Q's purpose is and create a plan for that system and help meet the needs of the city through that effort. This is a process that involves a lot of technical analysis as well as really

[01:01:52] important conversations with stakeholders, with member of the public, with bus operators, all of those people that help really develop this blueprint for the next 10 years. So a little bit just more on the technical side of the background. So ultimately, this is a state requirement. We heard about the Virginia DRPT. This is a stipulation to complete this plan in order to receive future state that the funding that helps support those operations.

[01:02:23] And with that, there is a set of guidelines that kind of outline the specific chapters, which we'll get into in a minute here. Q did complete a TDP previously. That was in 2017. I think we all know a lot has changed since 2017, both in the city and the broader realm of transit and just how people get around in general. And so this we'll look at starting in FY26, looking at 10 years, 10-year planning horizon for what the potential recommendations can be.

[01:02:58] The plans require those to be cost-constrained recommendations. That doesn't mean necessarily cost-neutral, but in order to allow, to be able to show that you can provide that funding for those recommendations. The plan must be ultimately adopted by the governing body for the system.

[01:03:17] That's you all. So we certainly want to hear from you all as we go through this process and make sure that we can help you understand and provide feedback into the recommendations that are

developed. 10 years is a long time to plan transit for. DRPT understands that. So we want to set that 10-year time frame, but there are opportunities to update that on an annual basis and flexibility, knowing that things change.

[01:03:47] So in terms of those guidelines that I mentioned, there's five chapters that are specified in the transit development plan, really kind of walking through a logical process. Chapter one, really, where does the organization want to go? What is the purpose? How do we measure success?

[01:04:03] If you ask different people, it might be very different to them what a successful transit system looks like, and so kind of identifying some of those performance measures. System Evaluation, Chapter 2, it's really we dive into the data. We look at where people are going, where people are traveling, how that's changed pre and post-COVID.

[01:04:23] And then we look at also the performance of the individual routes and the system itself. Chapter 3 looks at recommendations. So that can be anything from a service recommendation. You know, the bus should turn here instead of there. It could be when the buses operate.

[01:04:40] And it could also be more planning, you know, a policy or a study to do at some point in the future as well. And then chapters four and five really about how you implement those recommendations. So chapter four takes the capital side.

[01:04:56] So what are the vehicles, what's the technology, what are the bus stop amenities, things like that that need to build on what you currently have planned and then also to integrate those proposed recommendations. And then Chapter 5 is more of the operational side of where those ongoing revenues come from.

[01:05:20] And one of the first steps of that process in that Chapter 1 is to develop the goals and objectives for the system. And, you know, with something like that, we certainly don't want to start from scratch. We recognize there's been a lot of planning that has been done in the city, and so we want to build on that.

[01:05:40] We used the existing, the goals and objectives that were developed back in 2017 for the TDP as a starting point, but really looked at all these kind of plans that the city has done, as well as looked at kind of some of the trends that we're seeing in other similar agencies, and really looked at ways to kind of modernize those goals and objectives for our system.

[01:06:05] So with that, based on that policy review, as well as a discussion with some city staff members. We've developed these proposed draft goals. These are still in draft form, but we do feel these represent a strong summary of the priorities that have been identified in the city and how the Q system can help us get there. So one of the things we'll be asking when we get through is to hear some of your, any feedback or questions you may have about these goals in

[01:06:39] particular. As we move on to developing those recommendations, there's a bunch of different inputs to those. As I mentioned, those recommendations can be more service changes or they can be policies or studies that may need to be done. But really looking at a combination of those technical components, market demand, service assessment, looking at how the routes are performing according to various metrics and then that market really how where are people traveling when are people traveling that's something that's

[01:07:17] really critical that we get into and how does the bus service that's being provided align or maybe not align with those current trends and finally one of the most important pieces that feedback that we get from you all from members of the public from the people that use this system every day that's the most critical feedback that we can get because they know it best. And so we're ensuring that we integrate that into the process. And speaking of that engagement, we just wrapped up the first

[01:07:49] phase of public engagement on this effort. We created a public survey that was available both online as well as in person. We conducted some in-person engagement events, really went to where the people are. We conducted bus stop chats, so had members of our team, our bilingual street team out talking to members of the community. We also took a couple opportunities to ride on the buses and talk to people. It was a little cold out, so we got on the bus with them and talked with them

[01:08:23] about what we were hearing and really promoted that survey and got over 500 responses, which we were very pleased about representing a wide cross-section. And also you might have seen the bus at the Chocolate Lovers Festival if you stopped by. That was a big that was a big hit to be able to go on the bus. So briefly, so what you'll see here is a preliminary summary. I mentioned over 500 responses. When we took these, that was just a couple less than two weeks ago, February 18th. We got

[01:08:59] about 150 responses just since then. So what you see here is kind of an analysis of that preliminary data. We're working on digesting and summarizing the full survey that just closed last week. But generally, as I mentioned, we did get a strong cross-section of input. Generally, the respondents were more racially diverse and lower income than the city of Fairfax respondents overall. We had about 48% of riders say that they ride Q over four or more days a week. So frequent

[01:09:38] use. A lot of use of Q to transfer to other services. Q is pretty unique in the sense of Northern Virginia given its connection to the Metro Rail, to Fairfax Connector, and serving that relatively small geography you know in the full context of Northern Virginia a lot of people were satisfied and that's great news I think something Mr. Kuntz and his team everyone should be a proud of over 90% of people said that they were satisfied with the system so that's great

[01:10:12] great to hear and certainly want to build on build on that there was also a support for the fair, free service that has begun. So we asked a bunch of questions on the survey, and again there will be a full summary of that, but we want to hit on a few of those, the critical questions that we thought might be interesting to this group. So first we asked, this is asking riders, why do you ride Q? And those teal bars that you see are all of the respondents,

[01:10:49] And then we also broke out students, given how much of a percentage that Mason students provide to the system. So largely those two, the two top reasons, really, to save money or that people don't have a car.

[01:11:05] We did see generally trends from students here mirror that. But there was a stronger percentage of students that did not own the car. I should say these percentages here, just to clarify, these are a percentage of overall respondents, so that's why you'll see the percents add to more than 100, so people could select multiple options here.

[01:11:33] We also asked people who were non-riders why they did not ride, and really the ones that rose to the top here, although it was a pretty even, relatively widespread reasons here, but generally about coverage and frequency, and that is not surprising.

[01:11:52] We hear that a lot throughout Virginia, you know, making sure that the routes go where they need to go and they operate frequent enough. So, and then finally, and this is probably the most critical piece to developing our recommendations is, you know, based on these priorities and needs, what do you think you should focus on?

[01:12:16] And again, really the converse of that, right? people are saying we should focus on frequency and providing routes to areas not served and and also we heard a lot especially from students about those the the call them the shoulder time period sometimes you know later in the evening earlier in the day where service may get less frequent but there's still there's still a need for that so we would love to do all of these but you You know, certainly important to consider as we go forward, you know, the constrained resources and how do we how do we deal with tradeoffs and prioritize these different elements.

[01:12:57] So as we mentioned, we're just getting started with our analysis here, but did want to just share a couple a couple tidbits of what we're seeing so far. And first, especially since COVID, travel patterns certainly have changed. We're seeing more people travel at not just those really concentrated peak periods, but throughout the day, and looking at ways that the service can potentially align with that.

[01:13:25] So again, most of the weekday frequencies is roughly 30-minute headways, means the bus comes every 30 minutes. And then kind of later in the evening, it goes to 60 as well as weekend on the 60 minutes. So while it is great to have coverage, you know, if you can think about being out there yourself, you miss that bus, it's really tough to wait another 58 minutes to have to do that.

[01:13:51] So, you know, that's something that we want to look at and really trying to identify what are those time periods that really could support additional ridership and seeing how that can potentially scale up. Another way that Q is fairly unique is the route design currently. So Q has these two routes that operate in loops, so they both run clockwise and counterclockwise. Every time I say counterclockwise, I remind, I had a college, there was a college presentation one time where someone said anti-counterclockwise. And I was like, oh,

[01:14:27] Anyway, so there can be benefits and drawbacks of this route design. It does provide coverage and one-seat ride for most riders, but at the same time, that can mean that they are sitting on the bus for a long time, especially if you're trying to go to the opposite direction.

[01:14:51] What we've heard is some people will even get up to avoid being outside. get on the bus that's going in the opposite direction even if it's longer just so that you know they're not they're not outside but it's taking a longer route around the loop so those are the types of things that we'll be looking at as we look to develop recommendations one of the things we've heard so far is just you know an interest in some more direct direct connections potentially to some of the major the major spots so this is roughly about a year-long process. We, as I mentioned, we just finished up our first round of engagement

[01:15:30] and are here with you all for this first work session. We're going to be working the next few months on the technical side, developing those recommendations, sharing those with staff, and vetting those, and then taking them out to the public in that round, too. And then I just coming back to you all to brief you on those recommendations, get your feedback, and ultimately look forward to documenting those and seeking adoption in the fall. So with that, appreciate the time tonight. We had a few discussion questions here that we had identified, so

[01:16:10] we'd love to get your feedback and thoughts on these, as well as, you know, certainly if there are other questions that you all have we can touch on those as well thank you all right thank you for the presentation councilmember Amos I'm just going to preface to say that I love the Q bus so it saved my butt many times especially when I was going to George Mason and I was on crutches and it was a bus I could actually get on with crutches that's a complaint to George Mason by the way filled out the survey thanks to Wendy so appreciate that too I would agree with frequency

[01:16:46] being a big part of that I do recall that there were some nights where I wouldn't get home I would arrive at Mason at nine o'clock and not be able to get home until probably closer to 10 o'clock so that would be a portion of that but it also tapers off at night because usually I was one of two people at that bus stop so I get that as well before I ask I had three or four questions before I asked that the first question I want to ask actually came from a constituent who may have emailed all of us. I just don't know the answer. They were asking specifically about lanes specifically for Q buses and dedicated, yes, dedicated bus lanes. Do you have a general response for that?

[01:17:26] It's difficult to do when you have a constrained environment. It's BRT, bus rapid transit, and it can happen actually in a shared lane or in a dedicated lane. We do not have plans right now for any dedicated lanes in the city of Fairfax. It would mean taking away a travel lane for general purpose. There are other technologies that are used, signal technologies to allow like a green, if the bus is approaching a green light and we have the technology similar to what an ambulance has, it can keep the green longer to allow queue. So it's called transit priority. There are things

[01:18:02] that you can do to give transit priority other than just having a dedicated lane, but we do not have any plans for dedicated lanes at this time. And I'll say this, if I'm answering the team, feel free to jump in. I am not a transit expert by any means, so I'm doing the best.

[01:18:19] Well, you kind of answered two questions in one, because one of my questions was going to be about what about an express Q bus system, which I'm sure you've heard many times. When you say express, meaning fewer stops? Yeah. And like, for example, Vienna Metro direct bus access rather than having to make stops along the way. That is definitely something that we've heard just even early on in this process, a desire to look at that more direct service.

[01:18:45] So that's definitely one of the concepts we'll be exploring. Okay. In addition to that, what are our communications like with our neighboring jurisdictions like Vienna, Arlington, places that people would frequent a lot? In terms of outreach? Outreach, partnership, opportunities.

[01:19:03] In terms of the outreach for the survey, I don't know where the geography is in terms of where people responded from. It was mostly focused within the city, looking at riders and non-riders, but certainly throughout this process, we would be working with the staff, both Fairfax Connector, WMATA, and other surrounding agencies to look at where those connection points are.

[01:19:33] There's also regular, Ms. Ritter and Ms. Sanford can probably speak to, there's regular coordination meetings through NVTC, through NVT, where that coordination happens. And one other thing is that Metro has just finished up something called the Better Bus Network Project. And actually, Lucas and his team were the consultants on that. And so they were looking at improvements to the Metro bus routes. They also did look at Q as part of that. And so we are taking a regional approach. That's one of the reasons why it's important to look at those routings that are, there's actually new routing taking place in June, taking effect in June from

[01:20:12] that Better Bus Network. And so we're looking at where those new routes are going to be coming into the city so that we can coordinate any recommendations with that. So that maybe answers your question. Yes, excellent. And last question, in terms of stakeholder engagement, Old Town Fairfax Business Association, Central Fairfax Chamber, have we also done outreach with them as well? We did. I mean, we used, with the help of our communications director, we got the word out about the survey. Well, one other thing that's come up, Mr. Amos, is the bump outs. Some people

[01:20:47] say, hey, I don't like when the bus stops and traffic has to stop. Can we create bump outs? Well, that creates problems. I don't know if you want to talk about the issues we've had, Wendy, with buses that have pulled off of the travel lane, trying to get back onto the street. Best practices are for the bus to stay in the travel lane when passengers are getting on and off of the bus. Questions, comments? Councilmember Hardy Chandler. Thanks for answering that because I've heard that question as well. Mine is another family that is positive and positively impacted

[01:21:22] by Q. So thank you very much. They're very much a part of our weekday. I think 10 years is actually a short amount of time in the grand scheme of things. Will the Q system always exclusively include buses?

[01:21:43] That's a very difficult question to answer. For now, the answer is yes. We can talk about this as far as paratrans or trolleys, things like that. Other considerations. I'm just putting that out there.

[01:22:00] We talked about it briefly because I know most other transit agencies have trolleys and they've taken on paratransit and things like that. It's something we can look into. When I think about the changes from 2017 to now I just cannot imagine you know what's going to be happening in the upcoming years and what might be possible particularly in terms of direct routes clearly the hottest spot is George Mason and the second hottest spot is Metro right so what are some variations and that's not a question necessarily to answer now I'm just curious about that being thought about

[01:22:38] about and maybe part of future surveys even well some of some of the things that I've talked to Wendy about and we're looking into it if you look at our routes we go in what they call a circular circular motion it may be better to go what we call inbound outbound where you go from point A to point B and also looking at the peak times we talked about probably doing a tripper we put another bus on that particular route and that way instead of waiting 45 minutes an hour maybe be

[01:23:15] every 30 minutes every 15 minutes doing peak hours um trolleys are good they look good and they're good for like entertainment um small projects but not running regularly on a regular route because they don't hold up that well um paratransit i was surprised that city of fairfax didn't have paratransit, but I think there's another company is Metro that provides the paratransit piece.

[01:23:46] But that is something we could look at because we do have a senior community that may want to utilize that service. If I could jump in real quick, I'll just say it really comes down to how much we're willing to spend. Right now we use the same buses for all of our service and we run all day. When you start getting into different types of buses, different types of services, express services it just it adds different types of buses you might use a smaller bus you might and you have different numbers of drivers so it really comes down to how much the city is willing to pay for our transit service and so when we're the direction that I have given to our consultant team is let's really try to see if we can reallocate the existing resources in a different

[01:24:24] way rather than looking at huge cost increases but I really think ultimately the answer to your question is how much are we willing to pay and how much are we willing to put forward to support transit so speaking of pay my second question has to do with what is the formula for the George Mason component of it since they're such heavy users and there seem to be you know really a strong connection even to the point of the students being pulled out of the survey the student population is clearly a significant one as part of these these discussions and these

[01:25:00] plans. So I guess the first thing is, what is the formula for their contribution, and are there ways to expand that? So this is an interesting topic of discussion. There isn't really a formula. It's more of a discussion. There are many, with Mason that we have, there are many ways to calculate what a subsidy could be. You could look at how many students do we have riding the bus. I'll say, let me just pause there for a second. It's difficult for us to know right now how many students are riding the bus because we don't have fare boxes. When you have a fare box, when somebody's getting

[01:25:35] onto the bus and paying, and students were free when there was a fare, the bus driver would push a button to count for a student when they would show their ID. Right now, because we don't have fare boxes, we don't actually have an exact number unless we do a survey of everybody riding the bus. So we have an approximation. We look at where people are getting on and off to do a best guess.

[01:25:56] Again, when we had students, when we could count, it was about 36% were students. I believe that number is probably higher. But again, difficult to know. So it's not a formula. It's a negotiated amount. And it's a partnership with Mason. So some ways that you, when you calculate the formula, it comes out that they should be, they could be paying more other ways than the 927.

[01:26:18] Other ways you could look at it, they could be paying less. So right now we have a negotiated amount that is set for three years. And next year, it'll reset to another period of three years, which is why it's increasing by 3% from 927 to 950. So that's a short answer.

[01:26:37] I don't know if Mr. Martinez has anything to add. So basically everything that Wendy just said. I think previously the contribution amount was \$750,000. So starting in FY24 was the first year that we renegotiated that contract in the partnership with George Mason University.

[01:26:59] As Wendy stated, FY26 will be the last year of that initial contract. That amount is about \$950,000. After that, there's two options. Either one, we continue automatically based off of the consumer price index, which is about 3%, and or we renegotiate after that three-year window at the end of FY26.

[01:27:21] But there's other things to keep in mind is that, yes, we are getting students to campus, but now so many more students are living in the city and are also residents of the city. And so Mason does operate some shuttles, and they run their shuttles through Reston Limousine. It's a private transportation service.

[01:27:38] And their shuttles run to Mason, and their students take our buses. They take their shuttles. But what we're finding is that the students are living all over the city. They're also shopping all over the city. And so the shuttles are useful, but our bus service is probably more useful in many ways because it's taking them places that the shuttles don't take them.

[01:27:59] So it's not a direct answer. We would be running the bus with or without them. And the way we look at public transportation is that it's fewer cars on the road. And so regardless of if it's students or non-students, it's still trips that are not taken in a single occupancy vehicle.

[01:28:21] Councilman Peterson. 10-year planning horizon, do you have a projection for how much you expect, and let me just call it business as usual, for ridership to increase in the next decade?

[01:28:41] That is something that we will be working through as part of the analysis. Certainly, they are all projections and forecasts. You might be familiar. So the region, the metropolitan Washington region, does region-wide population and employment forecasts for each jurisdiction and then creates kind of a region-wide travel demand model that looks at the potential growth throughout the region, both in population and employment.

[01:29:15] So certainly we will be looking at those areas that are projected to grow, both from a population and employment perspective, you know, in and around the city as we consider. That's definitely one of those inputs into, you know, developing recommendations.

[01:29:34] Will we be setting a 10-year goal for ridership as a part of this? So one of the pieces in that beginning chapter is performance metrics.

[01:29:51] So look, and one of the things that Q and all of the systems in Virginia is required to report to the Department of Rail and Public Transportation is the general are the costs and then the ridership and cost per rider, things like that.

[01:30:06] So that certainly will be, yeah, that will be a measure, a performance measure that will be looked at. I think whether it gets adopted as an official goal or if that's a set performance measure, that will have something, we'll have to determine that as we develop the plan.

[01:30:24] If that is a goal, how specific are we able to be in terms of the different types of users, the market segments, and the potential to help them ride more to grow within that?

[01:30:40] Do we have a feel for that? Is that a part of this? I mean, I'll be honest. Certainly ridership forecasting, especially 10 years into the future, is very challenging, and there's a lot of factors that are outside of our control. A lot of times when we look at this, we look at access to service as a proxy or a way to look at potential ridership.

[01:31:06] So right now, if you were to find, if you were to look at a specific point, how many people are within a certain distance of that service and how much of people are within a certain distance of high-frequency service And how far can people get with that service?

[01:31:29] So looking at how we can expand the service to reach the people, reach where there are areas of density and people that have propensity to use transit in general. To build on that, so what you're doing will include basically identifying potential barriers to access and figuring out how you can help address them because this is access driven in terms of the amount of ridership that you get.

[01:32:07] I'm sort of understanding this correctly. And let me give you an example of, I think, where this is going perhaps is how Taylor made what our long-range plan can be. It would appear, you know, you've got one segment, which is students or younger people who are dashing back and forth.

[01:32:25] You also have commuters. And there's a side note here. We've got back to office going, et cetera. So there will be interesting issues here in terms of what that's looking like. but if i understand it correctly from the survey your survey wasn't broken down by different market segments but if i read the tea leaves it sounds like you've got a commuter segment that's probably neighborhood based that is saying one of the reasons i don't ride is it's kind of hard for me to get to the bus stop and that's a barrier to access and it

would be an example of if you want to increase your ridership for people who aren't riding now but could if we reduce that barrier

[01:33:04] who might come up with a way of doing that. I don't know whether it's feasible. It may be that structurally there's nothing you can do about it, but I'm just wondering how much you would sort of map those kinds of things so we would be doing as well as we possibly could to serve as many as possible.

[01:33:19] Yeah, it's a great question. Certainly a walkable street grid is a key driver to access to transit. In terms of developing like specific street segment or specific barriers, That would come in a more generalized transportation plan effort in terms of these are the specific sidewalk segments that need to get upgraded.

[01:33:42] That would be outside of the scope of this project. But certainly when we're looking, we have data on each bus stop and what the ridership is there. And if we see that a bus stop is having low ridership, but we're seeing that's in an area that might have really high density of population or jobs, that might raise a question mark of, hey, let's zoom in there.

[01:34:06] Let's see what might be happening here. Is it that people can't get to the bus stop? Is it that the bus there doesn't go to where they need to go? So that kind of helps us hone in on those locations, but we wouldn't yet be getting to specific infrastructure projects as part of this.

[01:34:22] And just my last question, building on this, do we have good data to indicate, generally speaking, How far people are willing to walk from their home to a bus stop? Yeah, generally talking about a quarter mile to a half mile.

[01:34:41] Well, depending on, again, the pedestrian connectivity, the comfort of the street. It's a lot lower if you're going along a highway where you're getting sped past. So you haven't sat in months and months of transportation meetings yet.

[01:34:59] no no no i'm talking about like with the transportation planning board so between nvta and nvta i know a lot about bus rapid transit and the last quarter mile and something called trail to transit and this is how people get to the to the train station or to the bus stop generally it is about a quarter mile but when they talk about trail to transit they're talking about things for instance pedestrian paths so if we don't have buses that go to every neighborhood but a neighborhood has a pedestrian path that goes to where the bus stop is on a major road

[01:35:36] that cuts the amount of distance on foot to get from their homes to the bus stop so trail of transit is a thing and and also the last quarter mile so come on chloe talk about it talk about it she's really the expert i just sit in the meetings and try to like keep up well so you did mention there's different connections to it scooters bike share and then pedestrian paths but one thing I did want to mention is we're looking at the small area plans where we're looking at higher density and as we look at any development the project that comes through we also are trying to look at where we can put bus stops really close to those higher density areas because

[01:36:12] that is one of the access questions is if the bus stop is right there and then if we look at express service as one of the options that'll give you an overall shorter trip versus having to like Lucas mentioned ride all the way around before you even get to metro and then you're still in metro for another half an hour so having a really long trip is also a barrier so we want to be thinking about the overall trip time and how

people are getting to the bus stop from not just to the bus stop but from their home to their destination in the most efficient way possible well and so it sounds like what you're trying to do is have a plan

[01:36:51] if you will or an approach that enables access for high density areas but also for low density areas and it's a different set of options you mentioned scooters etc etc so we have these different situations or segments and you're trying to sort of cover all of them if i'm hearing this correctly when you talk about bike share or scooters those are actually also considered transit and so you have the scooters which are not docked you have your bike share which are docked and sometimes there can be bike share we don't but have undocked bike share but you consider that all part of your transit system because they address that, they call that the last mile.

[01:37:28] Council Member Hall. So I have a number of questions, some are specifically related to the summer just in general. Just to answer or to address one thing that you said though, Mr. Lucas, was that, am I on? Yeah, I am. Yeah, okay.

[01:37:45] You mentioned that we needed to think about where we have sidewalks or opportunities for people to stand and wait for a bus, correct? Okay. I do just want to point out that I don't think that that should be a barrier to putting a bus route through a place because we put kids on school buses every day where there are no sidewalks.

[01:38:04] So to me, that's not the, it is a priority. Sidewalks are absolutely a priority, but putting a bus somewhere because there's not a sidewalk is still a priority to me. So if you could pull up slide three for me, just so we can look at the map together a little bit.

[01:38:21] So I think some of the barriers of the system in general for looking at what we could improve is really hitting some of those neighborhoods. So, for example, I'm going to pull out Cobdell because that's where I live. In order to get to the bus from my house, we would have to walk about a mile in order to get to Katherine Johnson Middle School, where we would then pick it up.

[01:38:41] It seems to me that some of these other neighborhoods, even if we could just, for example, put a bus that went down Norman Avenue or put a bus that went through. Sorry, I can't really see some of the other roads here, but some of the other neighborhoods, just kind of a primary road that goes through them.

[01:38:56] right? To me, that people are willing to walk that quarter mile, that half mile to potentially pick up transit, whereas I'm probably not going to walk a mile if then I only have to go to the grocery store, right? Like that's not, it's not super convenient for me to think about doing that. And I do agree that there could be some additional thoughts given to the frequency of how things run, because again, you miss that bus, you're not going to stand around for an hour, right? I mean, you probably won't, maybe you will, or maybe you've lost your job now because you're not there anymore. So back to the overall ridership, though. So we've

[01:39:31] talked about kind of who rides, and I recognize this is not an easy answer, but do we have any idea what percentage of the ridership is actual city residents? I know we did the student population, but do we have any way of knowing who else is riding besides that? So look at the specific question I believe we did ask something in the in the realm of that and we can see what those final numbers are I do want to make sure it's clear though that this was not intended to be a statistically significant survey in

[01:40:07] terms of a representative sample so there are ways to do more detailed writer surveys where you can really get those definitive numbers it's a very difficult question to answer you know the students are a little bit easier but also still difficult because even though we see people getting on and off at Mason people might be they might live somewhere work somewhere else and still might be students with the non-city residents also difficult to know you can look at who's getting on in the morning at Metro that potentially might be people who are non-city residents utilizing Q because they're taking the Metro and then getting on there it's difficult there's other transfer plate

[01:40:46] locations outside of the city. It's a difficult question to answer. Yeah, I understand. And I'm not really sure how to make it better, but just trying to think through some of the things. For those watching at home, what is the minimum age to ride the Q bus, technically? Is there a minimum age? By yourself? Well, yeah, I mean, like we see middle school students on it. Is there a specific age that is supposed to be riding or not? So the rule of thumb would probably be somewhere We're around 12, 13, without an adult, somewhere around 12, 13.

[01:41:17] Okay, that's great, because that's our middle school population, and I know that they use it a lot to get around, including my kids. Off-topic, sort of, but when were the buses wrapped with the new logo? They were just completed about six months ago, and they were started about a year and a half ago.

[01:41:34] It took a little while, because a bus took about a week. Each bus took about a week to be wrapped, but about six months ago, they were completed. Okay. And so I understand we get the portion of funds from George Mason.

[01:41:49] Yes. And I understand that we use the NVT Trust Fund that we choose for that 728. The ARPA funding of \$400,000, those funds are going to be extinguished at the end of this year, right? This is the last year of the ARPA funding. So next year, if we were looking at revenues, the lines would be Mason subsidy, state funding 30%.

[01:42:06] The ARPA would go away. Okay. And then the 30%, I'll ask for myself, but for those that are watching at home too, But the 30% funding, that's the money that we put in and then kind of multiplies, and then we bring that back? Or this is we're just coming up with \$3.5 million out of our city budget?

[01:42:22] No, so this is the funding that was generated from the new taxes and fees that were put into place back in 2014. Those taxes and fees all go to the NVT, the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority, NVT, different than NVTC.

[01:42:38] 30% of them, 30% of the taxes and fees come back to the jurisdiction where they were raised. 70% stays with NVT for regional projects. So that 30% money comes back to us. It is held in the transportation tax fund.

[01:42:55] So if you were to open up your budget to the transportation tax fund, in there, you're going to see two sources of money, the 30% funding and the C&I, the commercial and industrial tax. There are different requirements for how those funds can be spent. 30% funding can be spent on projects that increase capacity and also projects, public transportation purposes.

[01:43:20] And so we are allowed to use our 30% money for the operating expenses of our transit system. The C&I money, the commercial and industrial tax at 12.5 cents on property zoned, commercial or industrial, that can only be used for projects that increase capacity.

[01:43:36] So that C&I money cannot be used on transit operations. That's why we use the 30% money, but it is not general fund money that we are using to pay for Q. Okay, so is it safe to say then that the average resident is not directly paying for the bus service? They're paying through the taxes and fees that they pay that go to NVTA.

[01:43:59] Okay, and that's generated through all the other sources that you just said before. Right, so those are the transit occupancy tax, the additional sales tax, the grantor's tax. Those are the taxes and fees that everyone in Northern Virginia, not just City of Fairfax, is paying. Because all of the locale, so in all of those taxes and fees, the money from that goes to the NVTA.

[01:44:20] Jurisdictions can choose how they spend that 30% money. Our jurisdiction is choosing to spend that 30% money to pay for the Q system. Okay, so if we didn't use it to pay for the Q system, there would be an opportunity to use it to pay for something else. Correct. But we're still paying in that as a resident on a daily basis.

[01:44:36] Correct. Okay, thank you. Yeah, I was asking about the students in the George Mason, but we can't really answer that. In the survey that they took, did we ask them where they want to go? For example, you said that there were places that there wasn't a bus stop where they wanted to go, where they needed to go, or where they were trying to start from.

[01:44:56] Did we ask them kind of an open-ended of where would they like to see us stop? There were some options to provide open-ended commentary. We're still working through what those are, but we did ask that. Okay. And then, well, I guess almost finally, do we ever do kind of counts at each stop? I know you said that there's hot spots in that. Like, do we go to Mason and click, click, click, click, click, seven people got on here and then they got off at this stop? I know that's a lot of record keeping one day, but could we do counts over the course of, you know, one week or one month or something to generate that information?

[01:45:30] To find out what specifically? To find out exactly how many people are getting on at Mason and of those people, you know, roughly where did they get off? Did they take it all the way to the metro or did they pick it up in the neighborhood and then they went to Mason? Or was it a person who got on in the morning and pretty much rode it all day long for something to do and then didn't get off until, you know, six hours later?

[01:45:49] So one thing is that on our buses, we have something called automatic passenger counters. So they sense who is getting on the bus and getting off the bus at every stop. So we do have counts at every single bus stop for how many people are getting on and how many people are getting off. We're actually right now in the process of validating our APC data.

[01:46:06] We have people on the buses counting how many people are getting off to make sure our APCs are working correctly. So we're in the middle of doing that. We don't know, though, that if you get on at a certain stop, we don't know then what stop you're getting off at. All we have are numbers. We don't know how long you're riding, where you're getting off.

[01:46:23] We don't have that origin destination. However, you do have some of that. Weren't we talking about that yesterday with James? Yes, yes. So there's a tool called Replica Data, which is a data source that comes from anonymized, aggregated cell phone location-based service data that can show general travel patterns of where people are going.

[01:46:51] And that's something that can be very helpful and a relatively new, exciting data source in the realm of planning. I also want to mention, you know, I mentioned when we get to recommendations, most of our energy and time will be focused on those service recommendations, but it also says an opportunity, hey, if you all collectively think it's really critical that there is that more detailed origin, destination, and or rider detailed survey.

[01:47:26] That can be something that can be programmed into a future year to say, let's make sure we try to allocate funding in the future and see what other grant funding sources there might be to fund a more in-depth survey like that. Okay.

[01:47:41] Yeah, I'm not trying to spend future money at this point. I'm just trying to understand what we have already asked people that we could then be able to try to figure out what we can do with the data and understand it better. There are limited resources. We want to make it, you know, great for all. I think personally, I think trying to hit some of those other areas maybe that are not being accessed might be better. And, you know, maybe there are certain times where there is a bus maybe that kind of speeds to a destination rather than picking up a couple other spots. But I don't really know how feasible that is with 6.2 miles of what we have and what we have to work with. So thank you for the presentation and for all you've done.

[01:48:19] I know it's not an easy task when you don't always know what you're trying to get out of it. So thank you. Appreciate it. Council Member Hardy-Chandler. Okay. Very, very quickly. I'm just curious how you got the people who didn't ride the bus. That's a great question. So we, the in person, so the survey was promoted in a variety of different ways. So it was promoted online and that email, you know, there were emails sent to various community members, so I would imagine that some of the responses came from there.

[01:48:54] I also imagine we're at the Chocolate Lovers Festival, so I would imagine there might be some visitors there or people that might not necessarily use the bus, but we did get predominantly rider feedback. I think it was about three-quarters riders to one-quarter non-riders, which I think is a relatively good split for this, and so both of those, both of the inputs it's helpful there because ultimately i think we would all want to see if we can capture more of those riders those non-riders in the future and to follow up on that i'm very interested and intrigued a little bit about the unique queue experience as a draft goal

[01:49:34] can you kind of touch on some of the factors that contributed to that making it to the draft and is there some visioning around what that might look like yeah it's a great question um and you know kind of came up in our discussions, really. You know, a lot of these goals, besides that one, maybe, that you look, would be fairly common among other transit systems in Northern Virginia.

[01:49:58] And there was really a desire to, you know, okay, we are a relatively small city within the context of Northern Virginia. We take really strong passion and interest in making sure that we're serving the customers serving the riders um and making that an enjoyable experience and seeing how we can kind of make that um make the experience unique to what uh what q is i think this may have originated from uh something uh when you had said i feel like if you talk to people who ride q

[01:50:35] people who ride q love q um it's something unique i think um i don't know if you talk to people who red connector feel the same way and it's not it's just it's it's we're a small system we know all our drivers if you take the same route every day you're going to know who your bus driver is it's that's it's I think a gem in the city of Fairfax this bus system and I think it's different than some of the larger providers

because we can be more familial I guess I don't know if that's the right word and so I don't know if Charles you want to speak to it but you know we have great

[01:51:09] customer service. We have great drivers. And so I do think that having a unique experience is something that is particular to Q, that is not particular to maybe some of the other systems. Yeah, I would just like to add that it's a lot of work. I mean, just the fleet guys who keep the buses running. I mean, we're running all these buses constantly, keeping the buses clean, picking up the trash at the bus stop, making sure all the signage is there. Charles, making sure all The drivers show up and ride their routes and the routes being on time.

[01:51:42] It's an enormous effort to run this bus system. And the fact that we get such good feedback from the residents is a real credit to how hard those folks work. Council Member McQuillen.

[01:51:59] Thank you for the presentation. I really love the solar lights and signs. I appreciate them. I've noticed them everywhere. Were any of the students that were surveyed, were they high school students by chance? Or do you know if any of the students happen to be?

[01:52:16] The question that we asked, I believe it was just, like, how would you describe yourself? So I think it was just a student in general. I think I would say most of them were probably GMU students, but I don't think we have a split of that.

[01:52:32] I echo Council Member Hall's comment on the route. I also live in the left. If you're looking at the map, I'm on the yellow route in the left portion. And my son did ride the queue for quite a while after high school, following, you know, right out of high school at the end of the day.

[01:52:52] And it would take a long time for him to come home. So that was one of the biggest drivers for him not to ride the queue was just the long ride because of the route. So having something where you can kind of see where they're coming from and where they're going, more direct routes might be helpful. I also wanted to ask, do we take into consideration, like, school dismissal times or big activity times in the city when the Q bus is on their routes?

[01:53:16] So that's one of the things that we're looking at. They consider, like, peak times, like, you know, when the most folks ride in the bus. So that's something that we're looking at currently. And like I was telling you about the tripper, sometimes you may have to put an extra bus on there or you may have to maybe split the route.

[01:53:38] I think the circular motion, this is just me, based on all the years of experience I have. I think the circular route makes it seem longer as opposed to inbound, outbound. Because if you see a bus going inbound, you also see a bus going outbound, so it shortens the time.

[01:53:55] So we go from A to B. And then express service, we talked about that because, based on my experience, they love the Walmart, George Mason, and Vienna Metro. So if you could combine those three into an express route, I think it would change a few things.

[01:54:15] Thank you. I have a question on one of the slides. Why is the service time 60 minutes on the weekend? Is it just because it's more busy? So on the weekends, we run four buses at a time.

[01:54:32] I would say the weekend is probably a little bit slower than the weekday. So that might have something to do with it. and then um you noted sorry were you finished i didn't mean to interrupt you um and then you noted that the revenues are flat operating costs are increasing uh will this plan the feedback

from that the recommendation will you provide recommendations that will offset the expenses that you're seeing the increase in expenses will that be included in the plan recommendations We'll certainly have to look at, you know,

[01:55:10] what the potential forecast increase over those 10 years could be. Similar to a lot of the conversations tonight, you know, there will be a certain level of inflation that is assumed. The plan does require you to outline the funding, like kind of the funding splits and the, you know, the sources of funding that could meet those increases.

[01:55:36] Okay, but no creative recommendations of public partnerships or anything like that? So I think part of those funding sources could be additional funding sources or changes to existing agreements.

[01:55:55] We're not doing an in-depth revenue study per se, but certainly be able to look at what other funding sources might be out there. Okay. And then when we were charging riders, how much did we charge? I believe when we stopped, was it \$2?

[01:56:16] I believe the last fare we charged was \$1.85 for adults, and it was lower for seniors and high school students. I know it's been a while. Sorry. I feel like it was somewhere around there.

[01:56:34] Thank you. Thank you. Council Member Hall. Thank you. So if a person is on the bus, sees something, says something, has a problem, either be it with the driver or with another person on the bus, this is a resident question, who do they contact?

[01:56:53] Who should they reach out to to kind of bring that to staff's attention? So you're referring to one of the riders? So basically when a rider sees something, they normally contact the driver indiscreetly. Okay. Or they may call us on the telephone.

[01:57:09] I received a lot of calls. And then we, based on the information or what's needed, we take care of it. Either we forward it to the local law enforcement, or I may ride up there to see what's going on, or we may make some suggestions. Okay.

[01:57:25] And if they have other suggestions just in general, though, who is the best contact point for that? It would be me or Charles. Yeah, they call one of us. Believe me, when something's not going right, they call. Okay. So they know the number. They know the number. I mean, I know some of the people, you know, by on a first-name basis.

[01:57:42] mean because we talk a lot about different things okay um and just a council member mccullin's point um if i did the math right it looks like at a cost of 5.8 million for the bus per year with 984 000 riders it's about five dollars and 89 cents per rider that is correct regardless of where they're going just kind of as a ballpark number that's okay thank you anyone else council member Bates. Thank you. So personally, I would more likely want to see more frequent service

[01:58:16] on the Q bus. And I think that a majority of us on the council want to see, you know, at least explore more frequent service or, you know, expanding the routes. I think that those of us who live closer to existing routes want to see more frequent service. And then those who live further from existing routes want to see the routes expanded so and if you look at the survey data it looks like it's kind of an even split those top two spots as far as we want to see between more frequent service and then expanded routes and with maybe a slight lean toward

[01:58:54] frequent service and so certainly things that I think are worthwhile look into and we'd also I mainly want to look at which um you know the different options and what's you know more cost effective to expand service and what would yield the greatest um increase in uh you know in service um and potential riders served i guess um and then also uh traffic signal prioritization of q buses was something else that i think um that individual who emailed us had raised as council

[01:59:31] member amos mentioned um and i think that it sounds like that would be a lot more feasible than a dedicated lane especially chambridge road can't really do that you know unless you take several front yards pretty much from what i can tell so um definitely something else to look into very valuable feedback from from the resident who emailed us um yeah so that uh that's all i have for now. Thanks. Thanks. And yeah, I think, you know, you all and the people so far in the survey

[02:00:07] really, you know, capture that. This is the classic trade-off of transit planning, right? Frequency versus coverage. And it's often not a blanket solution, right? You can't just pick one or the other. You have to understand, you know, where and what qualities of streets, of neighborhoods, you know, can support that frequency versus, you know, maybe there's some lesser coverage.

[02:00:32] So, you know, that's the dealing with the constrained resources. Where can you really get the best, you know, the best investment? And it's challenging, but that's what we're going to look at and come up with the best options possible.

[02:00:54] Okay, a couple other things. Back in the olden days. Back in the olden days. So the first campus, the first dormitory at Mason opened in October of 1981. It was supposed to open in August of 1981.

[02:01:10] So when I came here, there was no campus to move on to. So I lived with my cousin Jim Graham in Falls Church in the Sleepy Hollow neighborhood. The only way to get to class every day was to get on a metro bus, get off in Fairfax City, get on the Q bus, and get to the campus in 1981.

[02:01:27] So for people who didn't have a car, it was a lifesaver. I think people are still using it that way. So when I looked at the survey results, people are not necessarily riding around within Fairfax City. Some people are coming in either on a connector bus or a metro bus getting on the Q bus to get someplace they want to go that the connector or the metro bus doesn't go.

[02:01:47] Unless we put ankle bracelets on people and track them in a very weird surveillance way, we are not going to necessarily know how many or how many people riding the Q bus literally came into the system or they're riding the Q bus to connect. And there are some bus stops in the city where obviously they can do that. They can get off the Q bus at a bus stop and pick up the Metro or pick up the Fairfax connector. So that makes it a very important key piece to regional transportation. As far as where it doesn't go, it doesn't go to Fair Oaks Mall, which is one of the reasons I think Mason put in the Mason shuttles is because

[02:02:23] our Q bus never went to Fair Oaks Mall. So when my daughter, who worked for Lord & Taylor, I don't know, maybe three years, we lived over in Camp Washington. She took a Metro bus. She took a Metro bus from our neighborhood, such a short, such a short distance from Fair Oaks, but you couldn't safely walk it. And the Q bus didn't go there. So she took a metro bus back and forth to work every day. So these are the, some of the ways that when we think about how people inside the city and outside the city are using the Q bus, there's a lot of variety there and we don't necessarily have our arms wrapped around it. I

think the survey is great and we're getting great survey results, but we really still don't know. But I can tell you going all the way back to 1981, there's a lot of

[02:03:02] people getting on the bus in the city who came here on another bus. The other thing is the transportation plaza at Fairfax Corner that they recently opened. And there's a lot of buses because they're kind of shaping that to be a major transportation hub in the county, which is right on the edge of the city. So our Q bus does not go to that transportation plaza. Is that a potential in the future? I don't know. I don't know. It's a question of how much we are willing to pay for it. So for a bus to go out there 15 minutes and come back another 15 minutes, that's another 30 minutes. And we'll lose riders who don't want to sit on the bus for it to go out

[02:03:42] there. So it's really another route. The same question came up a few years ago about going to VRE. We were asked, can this go to VRE? Well, it can, but what's the trade-off, right? You're going to, you're extending, and that's another 15 minutes that way and back. And so people don't want to sit on the bus for that long. And there's a certain point where they say this is just too, this is this bus ride is too long and so it becomes a new route which is more money so ultimately all of these questions about frequency coverage where we go outside of the city i mean i get calls i there was a you know there's another university down 29 like inner something international

[02:04:18] unit what was it called oh yeah yeah international university it's on 29 yeah it needs to be called something they called me and they said can you extend your service and come down there because our students come from other countries and don't and they come without cars um and you're just far enough out the city outside the city they can't get there how about northern virginia community college these are the questions that we get asked all of these destinations are worthy destinations and so it's a question of how much do we want to expand our service area how many more routes do we want how much do we want to spend i don't know that we need to expand everything but what would be better is if we had technology or an app that made it easier i know there are transit out apps

[02:04:55] out there because i use them but if people are trying to get from international university someplace for them to understand you get on the connector bus and you get off here and then you get on another but that's what i think is missing is that we don't have a very integrated transportation system where it comes to buses we there are transit apps sorry i didn't mean to interrupt you but there are transit apps where you can put in your start and destination and we have now we have one on it's a service planner um and we use the one from metro and you can and it will tell you to switch buses it's people don't like to once you get past a one-seat ride two-seat rides are less popular well i think but i do think education is really a key piece of this the other

[02:05:34] thing even within the city like when i first got in the mayor's seat and there was i think it was spotlight on the arts and they had a map of where all the things were taking place in the downtown and it showed all the parking garages and none of the bus stops you know this is a mindset too it's kind of like we should be showing people where the free bus stops or but but we don't necessarily we have not as the city embraced this asset we've had for 40 years into something where we are helping people understand how to use the asset so I was reading to kids yesterday at

[02:06:10] Providence Elementary School I'll tell you what the book was it was Sophia Valdez Future Perez okay and she oh god isn't that great and she like she creates a park out of a trash heap and um she goes to city hall and talks to the mayor and the clerk and she has petitions signed and she does all these things

anyway had a very robust conversation with this fourth grade classroom and i don't know how we got on the q bus i kind of get on the q bus we talked about invasives too but anyway i asked if people if these students knew what the q bus was and like maybe a quarter of the students raised their hands that they knew what the Q bus was and the rest were like what is

[02:06:46] the Q bus so I explained what the Q bus was and then this one student says well I rode the Q bus with my mom when we didn't have a car and I said well that's wonderful and then the student next year goes well I would like to ride the bus but I don't think my mom would let me I'm like well maybe the idea is that you and your mom could ride the bus together to see how the bus works so lots of conversation about the Q bus in fourth grade but this to me is where it starts I mean If the kids don't know, I had to describe what the Q bus looked like and the fact that it went to the public library and the middle school and it had to stop at the high school, you know, things like that.

[02:07:22] I just think we have this asset. I'm not sure that we have to change things or invest in things to simply think differently about how we leverage the asset, how we make sure residents understand how to use it, how people understand how transit apps work, so that there is a smoother way of getting around without us creating more routes, getting more buses or expanding it.

[02:07:44] It's just been, like I said, it's an asset the city's had such a long time that I just think there are things we could do to make it more valuable and for more people to use it. The other survey result I noticed is that people who said they took it because they couldn't physically drive.

[02:08:00] And I know that we've got NB rides, we've got, you know, metro access for people with disabilities, but I don't know if we're really reaching communities like, for instance, older residents or people who could drive but maybe would be actually safer not driving if they knew they could get around on the bus so is that is that just a segment of the population where we're just not doing a good job saying it's clean it's safe the bus drivers know who you are you can get around you know without being in your car and I just think more effort on that front with information and helping users understand whether they're young kids or whether they're older residents

[02:08:39] or whether they're students from other countries who are used to a different kind of transit system that may find our transit system fragmented and have difficulty embracing it, I would just like to see us figure out how to do more with what we already have, too.

[02:08:55] I mean, I think that's just a reasonable expectation. Yes, Council Member Hall. One more thing. I know Wendy, you and I emailed about this before, but I think putting out some more promos on Facebook, on our website, If we could try to just do a couple of different ads here and there, maybe in different languages.

[02:09:14] I know we're not completely there yet with all of our communication by any means, which is a hope, a goal. But I think if we're trying to hit other targets of audiences that we know are riding the bus, it would be great to put it out in their language. Thank you. All right. Are we good? Oh, Council Member Peterson.

[02:09:30] Do we know what the price sensitivity is for charging to ride? In other words, how much drop-off would there be if we charged X cents, dollars, whatever?

[02:09:48] So to get a specific answer, we'd have to do a more detailed, fair-free study. I mean, generally, I would point back to the ridership graph that was showing that even before the ridership levels now have

exceeded what they were pre-COVID, you know, when there was a charge.

[02:10:12] So, you know, there has not been a detailed study of what is the exact number. I will say the only transit service that I know of, especially in Northern Virginia, that is actually making money is the Loudoun commuter buses all the way from Loudoun into D.C.

[02:10:30] Those were the only ones. It is an inherent component of transit, that it is part of this, you know, a service that's provided to the general public and not as a, you know.

[02:10:48] The percentage of revenue that comes from transit on the bus side tends to be between 5% and 10% of the overall revenues. I think the word is infrastructure because we are thinking of this as something that makes money.

[02:11:04] or it should make money, or it should offset the cost of operating it. But it's like charging for a sidewalk or charging for the roads. We think of transit somehow differently than basic infrastructure. But Dash removed their fare boxes because it cost them more to collect fares, cost them more to collect fares than the fares they were collecting.

[02:11:26] And that's why we do need to think, when you're thinking about how many dollars or cents, but is the effort of collecting that money, even collecting the coins and counting it and depositing it in the bank and the staff time for managing the boxes cost more than they were collecting. So there is kind of this idea that a certain amount of transit or transportation is infrastructure.

[02:11:51] It's how you move people around an area. Fair enough, although we're deriving zero revenue, as I understand it, from riders right now. That is correct. We have a four-year zero-fair program, and we'll be entering the fourth year in FY26.

[02:12:13] And knocking the door at a million rides a year, knocking the door at six bucks a ride in terms of cost, \$5.8 million divided by \$985,000, right? If I got my math right, Billy, you'll have to check me here.

[02:12:30] Uh, and I think that all practical considerations, uh, considered, um, if it's feasible, is it possible and how much of an effect does it have on ridership to have some partial participation in this 50 cents a dollar, whatever.

[02:12:49] I mean, we have a tight budget, right? So, so we will be doing next year, um, uh, an evaluation of our zero fair program. So, um, we will be looking at these questions as to our ridership. how much would we potentially lose? It'll be looking at that as part of that evaluation.

[02:13:07] So we'll be doing that in preparation for the decision that this council will have to make before FY27. So we're obligated for during FY26 to remain zero fare. As the mayor has already stated, bus systems do not pay for themselves. No bus system does. A good bus system is getting 10% back. When we were collecting fares, the only people who were paying fares were, Well, so let's say who was free.

[02:13:34] All Mason students, staff, faculty, and high school and middle school students. We had an agreement with FCPS for that. So who were paying were either commuters or other adults, transit-dependent people.

[02:13:51] And a lot of the commuters were getting federal benefits. Don't know about the status of that. But we were charging fares potentially to people who least could afford to pay the fares. And so there is a question of how much do you bring in? Is it worth it? And how much ridership will you lose?

[02:14:06] So I don't know the answers to your questions, but we will be looking at that next year. So initially, when the free fare program came out, a lot of that money came from the state.

[02:14:23] And as time went on, it became lower and lower and lower. So you could make a decision whether or not you could make it without the fare. What I do know for a fact, because I came from some of the larger transit companies, One fare box now will run you anywhere from \$50,000 to \$90,000.

[02:14:41] So you have to buy a fare box. Then you have to find somebody that can work on it, which is slim to none. Then you have to worry about maintaining it. Then you have to worry about people counting the money. You might spend over \$100,000 a year just on one bus in a fare box.

[02:15:00] So, I mean, I go all the way back in the day where you just drop the money and they flip the lid and it drops down in there. Them days are gone. So you have to look at both sides to see if it's even feasible to do so. And no transit agents have ever made that much money in revenue.

[02:15:21] They came up with different ways. I talked to Wendy about this, but Wendy's the boss. You can make a little bit of money in advertising to make up. Yeah, that was a conversation that was had with previous counsel many years ago about advertising on the buses.

[02:15:39] Not that we couldn't have it again, because we could. No, I do think, too, that when you say, like, again, the fares, the cost of collecting the fares, if you're looking at data and evidence-based, it's just not there.

[02:15:55] It costs more to collect it than you're collecting. But the other thing is encouraging people to ride the bus of all ages. What is the flip side of not offering that? We're trying to reduce cars and parking and traffic, and we want to be more pedestrian-friendly.

[02:16:12] We want a city that's walkable and safe. And to me, getting more people on the bus and less people in cars and offering multimodal, which is the bikes and the scooters, overall benefits the quality of life inside the city. I'm just a very big proponent of buses generally.

[02:16:29] And at some point, we'll probably go electric. I mean, all electric. I mean, that's coming down the road. There's, by the way, VML is hosting something on March 14th in McLean about autonomous vehicles. I mean, there are all kind of things coming. When you talk about how long ago, 2017, what was life before ride-sharing and scooters and even having bike-share in the city?

[02:16:53] I mean, things change so quickly. Things that you didn't dream of are suddenly what you use all the time. And so even though we're doing our best to kind of forecast and figure this out, we have no idea what the technologies are that are coming that could just upend a lot of what we think we know about what's going to happen.

[02:17:11] I know you don't like ambiguity, but, like, I live in that space. I mean, I just live in that space, Tom. I'm like, just things happen. And you just can't always just put a box around it because you can't predict the things that are going to happen. You don't anticipate.

[02:17:27] Like scooters, ride sharing. What did we do before ride sharing? We did something, but now we just call a Lyft. We call an Uber. Any other final thoughts? This has been fun, though. I've really enjoyed every minute of this. Thank you.

[02:17:47] Thank you very much. Thank you very much. All right, Ms. Clark, who do we have up next? The last work session item is a discussion on the proposed FY26 budget. I'll recognize Brian Foster, city

manager, for the discussion.

[02:18:06] Thank you, Mayor and members of council. I will kick this off. Of course, we have Gwen and JC from the finance department here as well.

[02:18:22] Melanie's here. Brooke is here. David is here. as well, if there are things that maybe come up in their area. I presented the budget last week. And you, of course, had these lovely, thick books to take home and peruse with lots of the information.

[02:18:43] So we sent out just a suggestion of how we might want to structure the discussions. It's certainly not set in stone. you're welcome to change the if you know the direction but uh we wanted to sort of help you focus on you know manageable chunks as far as the discussion goes so we were so for tonight we were just basically focusing on the general fund which of course is our largest fund and we don't necessarily have a specific presentation i've given you a presentation we can review some of

[02:19:20] of that if you'd like. But where we need to be on the schedule is next week you will be asked to set an advertised tax, and I shouldn't say set, excuse me, to decide a tax rate on which to advertise.

[02:19:39] It's not the rate you're going to set. You're not voting on the actual adopted rate. So what's been proposed is for real estate, and that's what we're focusing on when I say that we have the deadlines as the statutory advertising requirements that we have before we have the public hearing and so to keep us on our schedule that the what's recommended with the budget that was presented was 9.5 cent increase which would take the rate to a dollar twelve point five or a dollar twelve and a half as a reminder

[02:20:15] and this might and for the folks the council members that are new to the dies and this is your first budget I typically recommend to counsel to actually advertise a rate that is higher than the one that's recommended and the reason is because you're still going to be having discussions and what you want to do and if you want to include other things or make modifications that would require additional revenue that gives you the option to have that as a possibility because by law whatever rate you advertise when it comes time to adopt you can

[02:20:55] always adopt a lower rate but you cannot adopt a rate that's higher than that without starting the whole public hearing process again which takes time and you have to go through the same advertising requirements so it certainly does not obligate you to have a higher rate than what's been recommended but it's just really more for your flexibility however you ultimately choose the rate you want to advertise whether it's the recommended rate that's in the the budget that i presented last week or it's some other rate but the key point that you need to understand is that

[02:21:30] you can only go lower than the rate that you advertise you cannot go above it without starting the process over so again typically that's what i would i recommend have recommended in the past to governing bodies just to give them that flexibility that's ultimately where we need to be next week and so we're gonna have another work session next week you do not have to decide that tonight by any stretch but that's ultimately that's your first decision point that you'll need to make what did

[02:22:05] they do last year do you know so last year and then more recently they've council has advertised the managers proposed rate and the main reason for that is because there has been very little fluctuation in the sense of either a three cent or one and a half cent increase so nothing as the current budget is being proposed at nine and a half cents councilmember Amos just to

[02:22:41] chime in so I'm not exactly sure how the structure is supposed to work for tonight so I'm just gonna I guess jump to the tax right I support proposing the Managers recommend that recommended tax rate not the tax rate. We're going to adopt. We don't know I would prefer not nine and a half But I think additional research is required. I mentioned in my budget questions. I said earlier I am concerned about the tariff war about to get into and how that's going to affect cost and materials moving forward at least for the next few years So we need to afford ourselves flexibility Again, we can go lower, but I think you know cutting off our own foot here is not necessary

[02:23:18] Since we have a couple more months of discussion upcoming, and I have like two other comments But I don't know if I should do that now or just wait till we so we can which it's your meeting. We can we're flexible To you know some of you said we're able to submit some questions ahead of time And so we've started the answer. We don't have answers for everything, but we can go through some of those if you'd like or However, however, you'd like to proceed. No, I think I mean if you've got questions ask your questions I sent my questions in early, but just to kind of clarify two things.

[02:23:53] One additional question, and then I think education is really going to be key in this. And so I know I briefly mentioned it before, including in my questions, I would like to see a more interactive format than public hearings because personally I'm not a fan of the public hearing process as it is nationally. So I'd like to see some type of interactive format like a budget town hall like the county does.

[02:24:13] Now, granted, they do it by district, but they still do that for jurisdictions of 100,000 people, 150,000 people. So I think we could do that as well. Um, and this is actually an email that I got from a constituent and I just wanted to get your thoughts on it. Can we get a chart that shows the city's tax rate compared to the rate of inflation? So, so the, so we can, but I want caution you and, and we've, and I'll start and I'll let JC and Gwen chime in because we talked about this earlier because one of you sent that question to us. We can show you the rate

[02:24:52] of inflation. That's easy. We can also show you the rate, the tax rate, so the percentage change over time. But if you're asking us to correlate the two, there are way too many variables to have a direct correlation because there's a variety of factors of what you choose to put in the budget, what you don't put in the budget. ARPA funding is a great example.

[02:25:14] We got a bunch of ARPA funding, which was put in the budget. So, yes, we can show you the inflation trend. We can show you the assessment trend. We can show you the rate trend. But if you're asking for a direct correlation, we are not able to do that.

[02:25:32] So just to clarify, if you're looking for cause and effect, we're not going to be able to tell you because there's just way too many variables in that. but we can show you individually and you can can draw your own conclusions then go ahead and so I've actually thought about that previously before and I think the manager is absolutely right trying my fear was if I presented something like that to council it may be viewed as disingenuous because

[02:26:04] there is no way to fully correlate that I'll give you a very quick example so Loudoun County in the last four years, their tax rate has actually gone down by about 12.5 to 13 cents, mostly related to data centers. Inflation during the same four-year time frame has gone up about 20 cents. No correlation between the tax rate and inflation there. You would think that they would both be going up. That is not the case. They have a different revenue source than we do or other localities. They're taking advantage of that. They're able to lower the tax rate from that side.

[02:26:42] So like the manager said, a multitude number of variables that it would be very hard to draw a very sound correlation. Additionally, one of the things that we do here in the city is we assess every single year.

[02:26:59] In my mind, inflation is kind of baked in with those assessments that get recessed every year. Usually those assessments appreciate every single year. So inflation is kind of baked in. How do I back that out? How do I back out meals tax? How do I back out ARPA? to try to really give you and the public the most accurate information where I wouldn't be challenged or say that I'm presenting something, again, not as genuous as I potentially could.

[02:27:28] Council Member Peterson. Well, just to follow up on that, I have certainly received a lot of feedback from people who are interested in cause and effect, understanding the causal factors behind a growth in a budget.

[02:27:45] the comparison with inflation is a helpful starting place for them because I think the first causal factor that they go to is whether we just have a general cost of living increase, the cost of doing business increase, and that's what's going on here.

[02:28:03] If there's variance from that, there's more going on than that, and that gets to the next stage of question, which is, well, what else is going on here and why? And that, I think, is a very helpful conversation because the drivers of this increase are specific, And that helps people evaluate whether they are in favor of or not in favor of certain things that are involved in that.

[02:28:24] But it sort of places this in context for them and gives them a starting place for understanding the cause and effect relationships in a budget. And I would say in a case like we have this year where the jump is so significant, people are very sensitive to what is going on here and understanding that story.

[02:28:41] So I would be supportive of providing the information. Again, I don't think there's an attempt, quote-unquote, correlate. I think causal relationships are the bigger issue here. I think people want to get started on understanding this situation a little bit more clearly.

[02:28:57] So I would be in favor of it. I mean, just quickly on that. I mean, again, it goes back to my point on education. It's more so, I mean, if you look at the main causes, it's essentially schools and CIP. But having that contextual factor, people can understand that narrative a lot more clearly.

[02:29:14] i mean i was explaining the budget process to my partner and she was like nine and a half cents oh my goodness then i went through the cip projects van dyke park went through the school contract and how we're in my opinion on the on the wrong end of that deal uh and when i broke that down for her she's like well you know when you put it like that so having all everything on the table completely transparent i think that's extremely beneficial especially for us as well council member hall i agree i think the town hall concept something where we address all these concerns from

[02:29:52] the residents in person being able to speak to them is key council member hall i think with the town hall format i fully support it i actually would like to see a budget committee made up of residents for the next time we do this budget so that there's a group of core residents that have you know express interest in being involved i think they can help communicate they can help make decisions they can you know help help feedback rather than just the six of a seven of us sitting up here but I think the key for the town hall for me is that it's not so much

[02:30:27] us talking it's us listening it's them being able to provide their feedback their thoughts their comments ask their questions and not in the public hearing opportunity when they can speak for three minutes and then there's no response that's honestly my biggest problem with this entire governmental system the way it's set up is that i don't think it lends itself to conversations very often and so i would love to see a town town hall where it's more resident driven than it is council or staff driven council member stacy party chandler i agree with that and so what we're

[02:31:06] having to deal with are both the current budget and what needs to happen in this timeline while simultaneously building a more inclusive i know that's a bad word but it's going to be a good word for us, a more inclusive process along the way. So I think one of the things we have to keep in mind is that while we want to engage the public more, we have to be very thoughtful about how we get there from here, because this is our starting point. And to the point of, I do think we have to

[02:31:40] be careful because it is tempting to want simple answers and I'm hearing you when you're saying that there's more complexity to this and I believe that if we provide the venues for providing all of that and not just you know isolated pieces of information not only do we get more input we get more understanding about the budget process and it carries more credibility to your little sample

[02:32:16] group of one to be able to really draw the lines between the dots. So I'm in favor of that while recognizing that we're not there yet and how we get there collectively while meeting the requirements of the decisions that we have to make now is something that we have to all agree and work

[02:32:39] together on. So we can certainly put together a meeting of what you're describing and where it's more interactive. That's not a problem. We can put that together. It'll take us a minute to do that.

[02:33:05] You'll have to make a couple of decisions like the advertised tax rate before we're able to pull that off but we could we can certainly do that um we we have time to do that um i would just say um that i think you you you have gotten a lot of citizen feedback by all of the thing projects plans all the things that you've done granted you're getting little snippets but just like you got feedback on the queue just this you know in that survey and then i've heard a lot of you say

[02:33:40] more frequent service would be great increasing the routes would be great okay well there's a cost involved in that i'm not saying we shouldn't do it there's cost involved in that and oh by the way we don't charge a fee we don't charge a fare and the funding the part of the funding that we have for that goes away the arpa it's going to disappear the grant for the zero fare going to disappear uh there i don't think in the conversation brief conversation that i've had with wendy the 30 funding um there's a max i mean there's just what that generates is a max

[02:34:17] and so without any change there's a likelihood of general fund money having to go into queue potentially depending on again depending on other decisions that are made so all of these things um are certainly interconnected um the schools is another i mean that's this by far the biggest driver um in in in how our budget ends up working um that can we can have that discussion later i mean i know there's some things to that they're working on but the the the root of that is the

[02:34:51] contract that we have um and if you don't change the contract um then then the way it's that's going to continue to be you know that those because you don't control how the county spends its money for the school system you're just on the hook for a percentage of how they spend their money um and so um that's that's the long and short of it um so there's other things so lots of these things um come about so

we when we talk when you know we talk about uh the when and i did my presentation i mean is the budget is as much a reflection of what you value as it is dollars

[02:35:29] and cents and and revenues and expenditures it's where you know so if you value transit and the q bus then that's where you'll put your you know then that's where you want to put your funding and i and i would say we we absolutely can do a town hall and i hope we can get some very good attendance um and people come out and participate but i would be remiss if saying if you that you are getting citizen feedback and you have been getting citizen feedback whether it's in the comp plan um all these other plans as far as what they want the community to be like what the things the projects they want you to invest in those kinds of things so um just just be mindful of that that

[02:36:08] that you you have been and will continue to get feedback that has budget impact even though it may not be a direct comment on the budget that's been proposed so we've got to assimilate all of that and what we're putting together. So I will call on my colleagues here. A cautionary thing here is that when people come to a town hall, they are not necessarily representative of the entire community. So Q bus riders may not be in the room to advocate for keeping the Q bus fare free. I mean, they went and they rode the buses, they were at the bus stops, they talked to the

[02:36:45] people who are actually using that service. When we ask people to come and talk to us about the budget, and I want to hear from them too, but are they representative? And if they're not representative, then they're representing the things that impact them. And we as an elected body, we need to hear from the community, but we also need to understand that there are sections of the community we aren't hearing from. And those people are the people who need services to be funded, and we're hearing from voices of people who are advocating for maybe something else or different priorities. So I do think it's always important to hear from people, but I think we also

[02:37:24] need to be aware that we are not necessarily hearing from everyone about programs they use that they care about. So we have to keep things in perspective. I'm going to call on Councilmember Amos, then Councilmember Hardy Chandler, then Councilmember McClellan. No, I completely agree with the mayor on that point, and that's part of my personal frustration with the public hearing process. When they did a national study a few years ago, they looked at public hearings across the country and found that it was usually the same group of people who showed up to every public hearing with similar complaints. And even with the budget process I saw with the county, it's either

[02:38:02] a group that's advocating for a particular thing, usually on behalf of like, for example, like parks or libraries or people who want the tax rate reduced. It is generally older, white, retired, people who don't use public transit, it's all those factors.

[02:38:17] So it doesn't have to be a budget town hall, but I do want some kind of venue where it's interactive, where people can engage, where even if, and I know there's costs associated with it, but even if we provided daycare for people, for example, multilingual services, if we can expand that to get more people there, I want diversity in these meetings.

[02:38:38] And be it a budget town hall or something else, I just don't think public hearings will adequately do that. Oh, yes. I did not know that. Girl Scouts. Shout out to y'all. Thank you.

[02:38:57] So I want to echo those sentiments. It would not be putting a meeting together because I think it would look like a public hearing, right? I'm talking about building a community engagement system.

That's why I don't think it's going to be a short-term, one-time kind of thing.

[02:39:13] I think we have to build a process that really draws in diverse voices Or else we're just doing the same thing, calling it something different, to your point about sectors of the city that aren't being heard. So I think there's some value and investment in that.

[02:39:31] And I guess what I'm saying, and I think people are on board, having the patience to actually build it because it isn't just a meeting, right, another meeting coming up. Second to that, I do think that, as I mentioned when I sent out a communication, that we should be talking about our strategic priorities.

[02:39:52] Our decisions should align with what it is that we value, and I think that we can have some more conversations about where this body has common ground in those priorities because what we decide on for the budget will tell our story about what we value.

[02:40:11] For me, it is very clearly a future beyond this council. I'm going to be looking to decisions that we're making now that have long-term impact. And that's why I think, you know, when we were talking about the Q-Bus, the 10-year horizon, that's very short in terms of my thinking and the future residents of the city that I'm here to serve, too, that are not here, are not necessarily impacted this year.

[02:40:42] The third thing is you said that your recommendation is to build in a little cushion, and I think that's responsible. And what are you estimating that cushion to be if we were to take that recommendation of building that cushion into the advertised tax rate?

[02:40:59] We discussed that internally, and, you know, we think, you know, \$1.15 was two and a half cents higher than recommended, and that's about the difference in the meals tax that's being proposed because we haven't talked about that, you know, because I've heard some comments about not liking on the meals tax.

[02:41:20] There are other options for you. We all know, you know, no one likes to be on the, you know, put it on the real estate. But the reality is that's your largest, that's the biggest bang for the buck in terms of, you know, the smallest increase gets you the biggest return.

[02:41:40] And so there's a combination of things that we can do. And, again, we've given you a recommended budget, 9 ½, or 1 12 ½ is the new rate. All we're suggesting is, again, to your point of the budget town hall and hearing what the citizens have to say, if you are then hearing a large response about specific things that then require additional resources and you wish to do that,

[02:42:14] if you don't advertise a sufficient tax rate, then you don't have that option because you can only go lower. I'm certainly not advocating a rate higher than what has been recommended, but again, it's all, to Council Member Hardy Chandler's point, as far as the values and stuff, and we welcome that, and that goes back to my first meeting when I asked those questions to try to get to help with the formulation of the budget.

[02:42:45] You are going to have that discussion. That is a retreat topic at your next retreat. Again, it's a timing issue. That's not until the first Saturday in April. So it is before you have to adopt the budget, but it's not while we're having all these discussions tonight and next week and the week after that.

[02:43:02] But it is an important discussion to have. So we worked with what we had, which was what was adopted. And so that is what we currently work from. And again, if there's a desire to change what some of those values are, tweak them, or move in a slightly different direction, perfectly okay.

[02:43:21] We just need to know that. And that's a very important discussion for this body to have with each other so we can be aligned with what you're wanting. And so we can make sure we're putting forth the right suggestions and recommendations in order to fulfill whatever vision and desires that you have.

[02:43:43] Councilmember McQuillan. So we went through a similar situation with the school board, as you guys know, with the bond referendum. And one of the first things we did was we did town halls and wanted to get out into the community to educate the public.

[02:44:04] And I believe that that was a huge part of why it passed with such a large amount of voters or votes. So I would like to see a similar outreach with this situation with the budget. I think in doing so, we get to educate, listen, collaborate.

[02:44:23] It provides the environment for ideas and thoughts to come forward. This is how we come up with creative solutions to difficult situations. So that's my thought process just on the town hall situation.

[02:44:38] So I do agree we get a lot of feedback, but this is a chance for us to build a relationship and to build trust with our community I too would welcome further discussing the goals and priorities of this council I love that and do we have the ability to introduce or pass certain fees like an entertainment fee the short answer is it depends so we're so again Virginia's Dillon rule state so it's what the state allows us so certain fees we would have I

[02:45:14] I mean, and so we just need to check in terms of, so I think what you're talking about is like an admissions tax, I think, perhaps. You're saying entertainment fee, like admissions on tickets to events? Yes, we learned that at a different VFPA conference. So that we would need to double check. And an admissions tax is, at least for some folks, is a level.

[02:45:32] Well, this is a fee. It's different than a tax. So it would go on the ticket. It goes on the ticket, yeah. Yeah, yeah. So I'm just, I'm thinking outside the box. I'm trying to think of these creative, you know, different things that maybe right now won't bring a lot of money, but potentially could if we have a large venue coming in.

[02:45:49] So I think there are potential options that we can look at. Absolutely. But again, do not want to presuppose any of those things in terms of trying to balance the budget. That's an action outside of the budget process that there's no guarantee for us in making a recommendation that council might take.

[02:46:13] member peterson just to clarify april 5 retreat is that going to be covering budget issues because my agenda that i received from melissa shinneberry says no no not the budget specifically what i was speaking to was the visioning and the goal set the the values and so forth that council wants to have that's that discussion is scheduled to take place then well i so i wonder um whether we should be thinking about allocating time and possibly a significant amount to a budget retreat and whether

[02:46:53] april 5 might be the time to do that and here's why this big increase we're proposing and in those cases it's pretty common for there to be an expectation on the part of constituents that we are going to be going through every brick of a budget with a fine-tooth comb to be sure we have done everything we could to avoid, to identify opportunities for savings, justify things that are staying and are going to result in a high increase, and that's going to take

[02:47:31] time, going to take time from all of us to go through this in a fair amount of detail. Again, I think it's an expectation people have, and I think it's a standard practice, but it is time consuming, and we

don't have a budget retreat set aside to help us together go through that. And I'm just wondering whether we ought to consider that. Well, we do have work sessions set up pretty much every single meeting. And while I do think that this is important and it requires a lot of focus, there are also other things that we still have to continue doing beyond

[02:48:08] the budget too. And some of them are kind of larger issues, which is why we were going to use the retreat for something that's not budget focused because we've got so much time allocated to budget discussions in work sessions so i mean i just i don't know i don't know what the saturation level is for talking about the budget probably varies by person um but i mean i'm happy to entertain that council member hall may i ask that maybe we see if there's another saturday that

[02:48:44] could work as a secondary option of this is the budget conversation if we can't get everything that we need to in these work sessions um we're all new right but most of us are new my apologies this is huge this is an unprecedented suggested tax increase this yellow piece of paper that i brought with me is a ginormous increase um we have way more taxpayers now than we did previously based upon the total number you know the total amount of real estate that we have here there's more condos, there's more townhouses, there's more single-family homes than we've ever had,

[02:49:20] and yet we're asking people for more money, and I recognize that it's a necessary evil. I've gone through pretty much every single page of this. I have a ton of questions, and so I want to do as many as I can in a work session because people are watching and because I think it's important, but I also, and I'm happy to send questions by email, but I don't want them answered by email because I want our residents to be able to hear every question that was asked and every answer that's been given um but so i think maybe just a second i hate to take up more time people's lives are valuable i get that but in case we don't have it i'd still like to have the april thing but i

[02:49:56] think we need another opportunity set up just as a catch-all yes and to your point about the um town hall and about the future conversations i love the idea of getting a committee set up and having conversations for the next time this goes around but i don't want it to negate us doing something for this budget and this time and just one final thing on this is that people when they get a yellow newspaper like this they kind of wake up a little bit right so we may not I heard from residents friends that I've not talked to in a while because they got this and so yes they might not care about the Q bus they might love the bike lanes they don't always come out and talk about

[02:50:33] those things so this is an opportunity to have a larger conversation that's not just tax bill focus but it's what are we doing with our money how why where all the things councilmember amos uh while i agree i i also wonder it is our first work session on the budget and i don't want to get too ahead of ourselves either i mean i would like to see how feedback goes with advertising the next week because that is a public hearing if i'm correct yes yeah there's a public hearing on the budget next week so i would like to see you have four you have four of those scheduled yeah so i

[02:51:11] I do want to see if it's an adequate amount of time already, because, I mean, let's be real, it's about to be 10 o'clock. We could set that up, but it could be a redundant conversation. And even if we find another Saturday in April, it might be a week before we're supposed to pass the budget.

[02:51:29] I don't know if that's productive. So I would like to see how feedback goes next week from the community, but also our initial responses coming back to us first. So I think we should send the questions

first, get that back, and see how that process goes. As far as the Saturday thing, I kind of meant for us, if there's still a bazillion questions that we haven't answered internally, not community-focused.

[02:51:51] That's a separate thing as far as I'm concerned. Sorry. Thank you. As far as the questions go, as far as asking to e-mail them, that's just so we can get a head start on them. Absolutely. We're prepared to go through at least the ones we can give you answers to that you've already sent in this evening if you'd like.

[02:52:08] I mean, so, I mean, and we can continue to, you know. And then, of course, just in general conversation, if you have questions, if we can answer the question, we will. If it requires us to do some research or verify answers, we will do that and provide that to you at the next meeting.

[02:52:28] Other thoughts? Yes, Council Member Bates. Thank you. First off, I am definitely supportive of the town hall idea. I do echo Councilmember Amos, Councilmember, or Mayor Reed's comments before that, you know, we do need to consider that, you know, whoever comes out might not be representative of, you know, the entire city, but it certainly is, I think, a very important part of this

[02:53:02] process, having community engagement, and it certainly is also very helpful in terms of, you know, there have been several cases when the feedback that I received has contributed to the conversations that we have up here.

[02:53:19] And as far as putting in a bit of a cushion in the advertised rate, I really have mixed feelings about that because, you know, on the one hand, as, you know, we've discussed before, public safety was a big priority of ours.

[02:53:39] And right now, as I understand it, the staff positions citywide are just, you know, flat. We're not, you know, adding anything else. Is that right? Yeah. And on the other hand, we just had a presentation last year on the results of an independent consultant review of our police department saying that, you know, we need additional sworn and civilian positions to increase the amount of proactive enforcement time that proportionally that our officers have.

[02:54:17] And that even, you know, we are short-staffed in that space. And even if you look at separately the ICMA staffing guidelines, you know, we're falling short of that in the police department. And, you know, I singled that out because we did have the independent consultant come in.

[02:54:38] Now, I'm hoping that, you know, maybe in future years we won't see this much of an unprecedented increase in the recommended rate. And hopefully we will be able to take another look at that.

[02:54:54] I was really hoping we'd get started on that this time around. But, you know, we might, just as an example, might want to have a bit of a cushion for that reason. You know, in addition to whatever else you might want to think about doing this time around.

[02:55:10] On the other hand, again, it is really an unprecedented increase that's suggested. And, you know, I'm hesitant to say that I want to advertise a rate that is higher than the recommended rate. But, you know, if we do, I think that we need to do so with the understanding that that is an absolute last resort, you know, as far as going above the recommended rate.

[02:55:34] And I'm hoping that we might even be able to, you know, maybe scale that back a bit, you know, short of the recommended increase and maybe even find room for, you know, there's always a

chance we might be able to find some room for some additional priorities in there as a result of, you know, moving some things around.

[02:55:59] So I don't know. I mean, as far as the advertised rate, yeah, I think that we'll need to maybe think about that a bit. And I guess next week we can maybe have some, you know, some different options and then maybe discuss further and decide which we want to introduce at that time.

[02:56:26] Yeah, we're certainly not asking to decide that tonight. I mean, next week is when the decision needs to be made. And, again, that's just to what you want to advertise. And I just threw that out so you could start mauling that over.

[02:56:44] At the end of the day, you know, if you don't care to do that, that's fine. But it just, at least from the real estate perspective, then that limits you to at that rate or lower. Again, that's where you get the biggest. That's just the reality.

[02:57:01] I mean, that's what the state gives us or allows us to do, And that's where you're going to get your biggest return with the smallest increase. I mean, you know, a one-cent increase in real estate generates way more than in personal property or other rates.

[02:57:18] And that's just our reality. And that's true in every jurisdiction. We're not the only ones struggling. I mean, that's just real estate property taxes is what funds localities. But the other kind of elephant in the room that we are not talking about, because it's impossible to really discuss it is what is happening with federal cuts you know we know that thousands of people in our city work for the federal government we know that that there are likely thousands more who work for federal contractors and if people start to lose their

[02:57:53] job there's every you know people lost their homes back in 2008 with the mortgage crisis they simply walked away from homes that they couldn't pay the mortgages on that sounds apocalyptic and yet we've already lived through it once and so the idea that if people lost their jobs they could lose their homes and those homes could be in a situation where they're taken into receivership it at the minimum we could see a decline in our meals tax for the same reason you know it's not just the tariffs making everything more expensive i mean people are already paying whatever for a dozen eggs but the fact of the matter is people are going to start cutting back on things that

[02:58:32] generate revenue for us like the meals tax. And I don't think we can predict that. I mean, we are, here we are. It's March 4th. We are so, this administration hasn't even started doing what they're going to do. And we're trying to do a budget, as is every other locale, every location in Northern Virginia, trying to figure out what kind of economic hit our communities are going to take. And what does that mean for the bottom line where we are generating the dollars, whatever the tax rate is to pay our bills. And I don't know that there's any discussion in the world that

[02:59:11] resolves that. There just isn't. We don't know what's going to happen. But I think the advertised rate going slightly higher between now and the end of April, that's like 60 days. We might have a better idea. I don't know that we will. But having a higher advertised rate, again, doesn't mean anything. We're going to adopt what we're going to adopt. But if something happens and we start to see evidence that it is a major economic disaster we we need to think about that that is the responsible thing to do because we don't know what's going to happen i mean that's just my

[02:59:51] thought on this council member amos and this is more so a question what is the likelihood that we would also see another jump in the fcps budget like we did before like we did fy 2025 so currently we're projecting about eight and a quarter for 26 and potentially 27. Beyond 27, we have not estimated or projected where we would be coming in. I think as the superintendent and chair

[03:00:24] pictures mentioned, trying to have those discussions with SCPS potentially doing a cap would be very beneficial for the city if we can negotiate a percentage of that, whether that's 3%, 4%, 5%, hopefully not 13 or 14 percent but uh that's the best estimate right now sir okay i mean that's just something to have in the back of our minds too and this is goes to councilmember hall's point about maybe we need to fix up the schedule uh just because we have that unpredictability we have cps and then we get a seven million dollar gap out of nowhere and we have to figure out how to pay for

[03:01:03] it so i think we should think about that and if you wanted to talk more on it but the other thing I was going to say thank you is that you're asking that question but we also there's going to be additional townhouses condos apartments where people are moving in right things that are now ready in a neighborhood where they were built that they weren't ready six months ago so that average daily membership that tuition bill is going to go up incrementally just because we have people that are now suddenly in their homes that they weren't before so even no other changes that's more students in our building. And that's something that we try to predict. That's something

[03:01:40] that I know Mr. Foreman does a very nice job of looking at what's being built and where and all of those numbers. But people are living in different places than they ever were before, right? Before you wouldn't expect a townhouse to draw that many or whatever else. But those ratios are changing. And so we might have 20 more students that enroll in between now and the end of the school year that we weren't even expecting and we can't we don't know how to work those separately I do think we should jump into the questions and responses the budget if I can just make one blanket question comment and this is directed at no one it's just me trying to

[03:02:18] understand but using the words miscellaneous and other when it refers to income and expenses it kills me like I need to know what's behind that and I recognize that you have some notes on things, but when I see like anything over even \$200,000, \$100,000, it just makes me wonder like what is made up in that number, and I think that that's something that needs to be detailed out for everyone. I know I see your face, and I hate that. I'm sorry. I know, but I know it's more work, but I know you have the information, so I know it adds probably 100 pages to our budget

[03:02:55] books but I just think it's really key thank you I was just very quickly so we roll up which is a very common practice in localities or actually any budget so we have roll-up codes if we were to provide the detail it would probably be about a 1,800 to 2,000 page document we have a very extensive exhaustive Excel model macros crashes every once in a while that has thousands tens of thousands of lines that roll

[03:03:31] up and we're trying to provide a high level detail even though it's not that high level we are trying to give you some information we are more than happy if council so chooses to give you all the detail the 2,000 pages or so of information is there a way to make it like a read-only access so we can look at it if we want or would you prefer that I see, okay, this is in this department, this line item, this is what I want to see and then you provide that detail. I don't want to put more work into it, but if it's available and we can browse, then that works for me if it works

[03:04:04] for you. I could create, you know, high-level PDFs of all the Excel spreadsheets would probably be the easiest way. Like I said, it's a huge macro workbook that is very detailed. And to give you that, I wouldn't put that on my worst enemy. I don't even manage it because it's beyond me.

[03:04:34] But pulling out the information in a usable PDF of those pages, it would be separate between revenue and expenses by department is the way it's built short of doing that maybe I'll when I take my next dive in maybe I'll pull up a couple things that I'd like to see and then maybe we can go from there because I don't want to create more of a burden I really don't okay thank you mayor also I think I think all of you have availed yourself in the over the next week you all have individual meetings um with the staff where we can if we want to get into some of those really

[03:05:13] nitty-gritty things that we can to make sure you just give you a better comfort level of you know what's in the budget I mean just to be you know really blunt about it the the the magnitude of what you're trying to deal with you're not going to solve in looking at all the line items and trying to find a little bit here a little bit there a little bit here we can certainly go through that exercise you're really what you're talking about now is you're talking about service levels staffing levels that's what that's what you're talking about if you're wanting to make a

[03:05:51] significant impact and as far as the amount of the rate that you want to that you're wanting if you're wanting to reduce the potential rate and also keep in mind that the way we've structured it and we and we were very intentional in structuring this way yes it's a big jump but you we're also thinking about the future we're not just thinking about this this one year you've got a tremendous forget about cip you could get rid if you want to get rid of all the cip projects fine

[03:06:25] but you still have 250 or 220 million of approved school bond projects that's going to have uh that if you remember from the Davenport study, they said if nothing else happened, 20 cents on the real estate tax rate, ultimately, to fund that debt service. Now, lots of things could change between now and then, but we've given you debt capacity, a revenue stream that's going to get you started to do that. So the more you want to reduce is fine, but you're also potentially

[03:07:02] impacting what we've set you up for and you're just going to have to do this all over again next year um potentially and potentially depending on where you end up potentially more next year than this year so I don't I'm just I'm just saying we and we we can walk you through all of that um but that's the other piece um that and I recognize you all have a very difficult decision in how you have to vote for this.

[03:07:32] I certainly don't envy that. Just like it was difficult for us to craft something and put it together to where it wasn't. If you remember just the school piece, we were starting at 13 ½ without anything else.

[03:07:48] And so it's down to 9 ½, but obviously we moved some of that in other ways to help generate that revenue. Yeah, I think I'm going to put right out there the number that I asked for specifically which was the thrown toilets not saying I support them or I don't but that was a huge number a couple years ago and I'd like to know what that costs now and what that costs moving forward that's one specific thing so there's going to be things like that in other areas of the budget that I think we all kind of have our own questions about and again absolutely so we have that number we can talk about that tonight we we pulled that because you

[03:08:25] sent it to us head of time um but remember that's also a level of service I mean you might not think a level of service but part of that is it's providing um portable restrooms uh and maybe it's maybe it's

at a level uh that you don't want we can have a lower level of portable restrooms and that's fine but it still gets back to that underlying question which is what's the level of service and so forth um that you want that citizens expect that you're wanting to provide for the citizens so it's it's all interrelated but we we but we any and that's why i'm saying any question you want to ask we can we can pull that information for you and i have i need to pull it up but i have

[03:09:04] that information well i appreciate that but i also think there's probably services that we don't even know we're offering that as a brand new council for the majority of us we want to try to understand that so that when our residents ask us questions we can say yep we provide that service like when people move to the city i had no idea there was a flyer that went to them no idea right we were trying to recreate we're trying to create one on our first day and there's already one so it's things like that that we don't know what we don't know and we're trying to know those things council member peterson where did we land on carving out an extra saturday just for budget so an extra

[03:09:41] saturday or as opposed to basically using the fifth just for budget are we looking council member hardy channel sorry i think the suggestion was to go with the work sessions and if we didn't get through everything to have the extra saturday as a cushion as a plan b if we needed more time because we are new and may have questions.

[03:10:07] But to stick with the work session, I will say personally my preference is this schedule because I need it chunked. I need it in sections to make it digestible for me. So I feel like this is helpful, but I do understand, and I feel like it could be possible to carve out some additional time if we need it just in case, not instead of.

[03:10:30] Okay. So the question still is, do we want to keep the agenda for April 5th or make the agenda for April 5th budget? Keep April 5th as is, because my understanding is we're also setting up a bus tour to tour the CIP projects.

[03:10:48] That's a different day now. Oh, they're moving on to a different day now. Oh, good Lord. All right. I trust y'all. We've broken that up to make it easier. But let's keep, not every meeting needs to be about budget because not everything is about budget. It is the thing that's going to consume our lives for a bit. But let's build in the cushion, see what's working.

[03:11:06] And if things aren't working or we have questions left over, then we can use that cushion. I don't think we need to pull the trigger tonight. Okay. Is that a fair consensus? To be clear, so we would, it's a contingent option. Yes.

[03:11:22] We can make it a contingent option. Great. Okay. That's good. Okay. Yes. Would you like me to go through the answers that we have? Sure. Okay. So I think Council Member Bates sent an email.

[03:11:41] I think he was first, so we'll go through his first. And then he said, first, the increase in education, that we mentioned the kinds of increase in education costs is not sustainable. Are there any suggestions to address that? Well, I think with the school board, you heard some of the suggestions that they're working on.

[03:12:04] That is the elephant in the room. just a council member quillen asked a question about what how everybody else is doing so just very briefly the city of fairfax i think is unique in how it does the schools and the fact that you contract with another entity to operate your school so you're operating by a

contract everybody else what i would call the traditional method you know is um they they formulate the budget they ask you know they approach their governing body for for funding and

[03:12:42] then there's this this back and forth there are Williamsburg James City operates a joint system and I think Greensville County and Emporia operate but I don't but I don't think it's a tuition contract and even if it were it's not the same because they're much smaller and it wouldn't be set up set up quite the same way so changing the contract if there are ways to amend it If you can do a cap, quite honestly, I think a cap would be a great start, but I think, in essence, you're amending the contract if you put in a cap.

[03:13:17] And so there's different, you know, the comment that was in there about, you know, it's more cost-effective to do it this way than operate your own school system. That may be, although I would say at some point the lines are crossing, and to where that may be a consideration.

[03:13:41] The comparison with the Falls Church City, their fiscal 25 budget, total budget for their school system is right at \$65 million. And of that \$65 million, 52.5 is city funding, and they have an ADM of 2634.

[03:14:01] So there may be 300 students less, but they're operating there. No, I'm just giving you the numbers. You can argue whether their system is as high a quality or not as high quality or offers more things, doesn't offer more things. But in terms of operating, just from a pure number standpoint, that's probably your best comparison.

[03:14:24] I just leave it out there. But anyways, so things are – so the only way I think you're going to address that is how that contract and that funding gets structured because you're not controlling how the county school system spends its money, and our school board is not controlling that.

[03:14:42] You're just left with a formula and paying the bill. Currently, any unfilled positions that, in your opinion, could be frozen without significantly affecting city services? Right now, the short answer is that would take a little more analysis to make sure we always can to look at that most of the positions our large number are in public safety so I'm assuming you want to we would want to continue the public safety there's a building inspector position we're required to provide that service and again with all the development we're having I don't think that's a position you would want to freeze there's some in

[03:15:21] sanitation etc one in animal control so yes there's a vacancy we can certainly continue to look at that but again that starts to impact service levels so I'm not at this point I don't know that there is something for us to continue to look at same on the same line currently any field position so that in your opinion could be frozen or consolidated upon turnover without termination without significantly affecting city services sort of the same probably give you the

[03:15:56] same answer off the top of my head I'm not sure that there there are but as we have turnover that's one of the things that we look at in terms of before we just run out and fill the position and I would just again mention and I mentioned in my budget presentation that we do manage vacancy savings as part of the budget so when we have vacancies we account for that which in essence lowers your funding requirement because we're not in essence budgeting a hundred percent of every position full cost of benefits because we know there's going to

[03:16:32] be turnover naturally occurring turnover throughout the year so that is one of the tools that we use I think probably JC can you pull up the couple couple of slides and then because last thing is any potential opportunities for cost savings minimal impact to city services so I remember if you remember I

told you we would give you options and so here are some alternative options which we did not talk about one is the personal property tax that's the one for most

[03:17:08] residents that's the vehicle that's the tax on their personal vehicles that's also one that's also loathed by most people one penny of personal property tax generates forty thousand in revenue roughly current currently ten cents would be four hundred thousand which is roughly which is a rough equivalent to a half cent on the real estate tax rate so again if you're looking to switch things out that's an option for you the average ppt rate in northern virginia is

[03:17:42] \$4.30. So at \$4.13, we're slightly less. And then, of course, there's some that are significantly less, you know, in the \$3.50 range, and then there's some who are in like the \$6 range. So, I mean, again, the average \$4.30. The next slide is also related to personal property tax.

[03:18:03] This is something that could be done that can give us a one-time benefit, but it, and I caution you. It's a one-time benefit, so not using it to fund operations. But we could switch to twice a year collection for personal property tax. Just like you have real estate, you pay half June, half in December. Right now you pay personal property tax the whole year in October. And it is as of January 1st, so you're paying in arrears. You could change that to where you have half due

[03:18:35] in april half due in october then the year that you made that switch the city would realize a one-time revenue increase of six and a half million dollars that is an accounting issue because we do a fiscal year july to june and residents pay the tax on a calendar year january to july i want to stress that that would not be a tax increase that would pay the same just in two separate payments. The next slide will show you how that works. So this year, October 2025,

[03:19:13] calendar year 25, 100% of the tax is paid. That is our fiscal 2026. If you made the change to be effective for the next fiscal year, which is the next calendar year, they would then pay their first half of calendar 26 in April. That is still fiscal 2026. That is where you get the one-time gain in essence you're going to get 150 percent of revenue in 2026 however residents pay 100

[03:19:45] percent in 2025 they pay 100 in 2026 april october they pay 100 in 2027 april october that's a one-time gain what do we use one-time revenues for we use it for one-time expenses so we have recurring revenue to pay the one-time debt the nine if you remember from the presentation 9.8 million dollars it's the three million for schools to start their projects six and a half or 6.8 for the one-time debt that we have you could put that six and a half towards that

[03:20:23] you would not need recurring revenue which means you could lower uh the tax rate but that then decreed then to what I just said earlier you were then cutting the future capacity that we've built in which means you're just gonna have to turn around and raise and in for next year in the future all or it or you can or you could have it slightly less but still dedicate all of that for for debt service so there's some ways to work on there's some ways working that the reason this was not in the budget is because this is a whole different thing that you would

[03:21:01] have to agree to vote on and we weren't going to count on this as a budget balancing tool as far as what we propose to you but it is an option and that would give you some flexibility in how we're funding and doing things and I think mayor councilmember Hall has a question yes councilman Hall so as far as I'm concerned this is the most hated tax but i don't hate this option and i say that because i i think it's

expensive for many residents and i think it's something that you kind of forget about so i i'm not opposed to paying it twice a year

[03:21:39] what i am curious about though is what is the additional staff and internal costs time wise postage wise all of those things that would go into this so we would we haven't asked we we would need to calculate that i believe that the the additional cost is mainly going to be in the postage and the mailing that piece from a staff perspective again all the work is done to for the bit you know for because it's as of January 1st so it would front load some of the work in the beginning of the year because it's they have less time to get it ready because instead you know

[03:22:16] because they've been working towards an October on time frame but I'm not going to say there's not some additional work on staff because we would need to ascertain that uh for certain but it's still a making this change to your point um is a way to for the taxpayer to spread that payment out so it's less than they have to pay all at one time um but it's all but it's an it's a one-time revenue opportunity that is neutral neutral to the taxpayer other than they will complain that they just paid you in October and they got to turn around and pay you a part again

[03:22:55] in April but that's that's a one-time problem and then it and then it takes care of itself let's remember Amos I mean uh in terms of the personal property tax while I agreed is the most hated tax because I hate it too um I would argue that it is the tax I would actually probably get to people who rent in the city as well more so than the real estate tax rate would which includes myself in this situation, so I do want to throw myself under the bus in terms of that conversation.

[03:23:30] I like the two-payment option just because I would rather pay in two payments than one, but my biggest concern with this budget is that deferring is something that we've had an issue with prior councils doing, and I don't want to replicate that, and one of the questions I asked was specifically about what the tax rate would look like next year if we had to move forward with this 9.5 cent proposal because I imagine each reduction we go for, I mean, debt is debt.

[03:23:56] We owe it. We're obligated to it. So what exactly are we looking at? Because I see this as much as a FY27 issue as a FY26 issue. Let me just say, I'm not looking at it from a let's raise the tax and I'm not looking at it from a, let's look at it as a one-time windfall.

[03:24:13] I'm looking at it as a, I really like this idea in general. That's all. No, we appreciate that. I mean, that's one of the things we talked about is that it can be, people will look at it different ways, but certainly it can be helpful for them to spread it out.

[03:24:33] Let's went for Peterson. Well, we should, I think, be sure to get some public feedback on this because people don't like going through the drill of paying taxes. And more than one politician has lost re-election because they altered the method by which that happens.

[03:24:52] and so uh check it out i mean some rather famous people have lost their jobs because they changed the way folks paid their annual taxes and so there's a there's an issue i think we need to be sensitive to uh just real quick to build on that because i forgot to ask my question is how would tax relief work specifically for personal property tax it's there's no impact the way the personal property well i say there's no impact the way personal property tax works now Just a quick history lesson when this was done.

[03:25:23] Jim Gilmore was governor, and he campaigned on no car tax. The idea was it was going to phase out to where the state was going to reimburse for ultimately 100%. So localities would be held

neutral, but then the tax would go away.

[03:25:40] The problem is it was extremely expensive, and they couldn't afford it. So what the state has done is they've capped. We get a fixed payment every year, and that payment is then distributed to the – there's a calculation that's done each year on how much, quote-unquote, relief that you're getting.

[03:26:03] And that, quite honestly, as the population grows and there are more cars in the city, that relief is going down anyway. But from a city perspective, it's a flat amount that comes in, and it doesn't change.

[03:26:21] Yeah, and less so about the allocation of funding, I mean more so the schedule. Because, for example, I think the application is usually due in May time frame. And I remember because when I first moved to the city, I didn't know that because the county, you can do it whenever you want. But we had it for May, and so when I moved here, I didn't realize that.

[03:26:39] I tried to apply for it in, like, September because I'm a procrastinator sometimes. and couldn't qualify for it so wanted to know how that would work with two separate payments i can speak we don't i believe only disabled vets get tax relief for personal property right are um i meant damage and high mileage you would it's this we can confirm with the commissioner it's the same process again you would do it you would i guess have to do it earlier in the year because one because if you divide it into two payments you would want the effect of that

[03:27:15] in the first payment obviously but again just as a reminder that the the liability for the tax is january 1 and so whatever happens after that i don't want to say it's irrelevant but it's just it doesn't it's it's whatever so like if you sold that car when we get this a lot i sold my car on on january 30th well that's great except you owned it on the first of january you're still liable for the tax. We don't prorate, so you're liable for the whole year. So one of the things is by paying in April and then again in October, you would catch, you would less likely adhere to some of

[03:27:54] that because the pay due date versus when the liability incurred is much closer together. So again, it's just, you asked about options, and this goes to Council Member Bates' question of you know what other creative things or whatever so these are some of the things that um uh that are possibilities again things to consider um if if you desire i'm sorry just to comment if you only own your car for six months out of the year you only pay the tax for the six months you don't pay for the whole 12 months yes you do you're liable for the whole year i don't unless this

[03:28:31] well let me let's say that i don't think we prorate do we yes yeah we've received i mean we've sold a car in a partial year and halfway through the year and we only get a bill for three that's really clear to our residents I think it would be the same as for real estate if you sold or had an improvement or if you received tax relief fairly we can make adjustments throughout the year and there will be refunds or whatever that would account for that piece but I don't think the dollar amount as the

[03:29:06] city manager said the dollar amounts wouldn't be significant yeah yes mr. Martinez so just to go back I don't think councilmember Amos question was fully answered and I think you're alluding to what would the potential rate be for FY 27 utilizing this method with the crystal ball being very cloudy but utilizing the six point five million dollar as a base that's equivalent right now to about seven cents so and as the manager stated this is a one-time

[03:29:44] revenue source. So there would potentially be the need in FY27 to increase by seven cents, potentially. Now, that being said, just really quick, back in 2007, the real estate tax rate for the city was 72

cents. Between 2007-2010, it increased 24.5 cents, or almost 33 percent,

[03:30:14] nine cents alone in 2009 between 2007 and 2013 it was a total increase of 35 cents or about 47 percent increase that was also right after the last bond referendum other than what just passed in november for the high school and the middle school if i'm not mistaken in 2004 additionally there is significant investment within the city infrastructure specifically where we're sitting right now the city hall annex was built during that time frame the new police headquarters was

[03:30:51] also built historic Blenheim site was also done and then there was some really good undergrounding utilities in Old Town as well so a lot of investment infrastructure that was done during that time frame between in the city and again about a 35 cent increase 2007 it was a one cent increase 2008 it was a seven cent increase 2009 again was a nine cent increase and then 2010 was a seven and a half cent increase oh are we good are we ready to okay move on to the next thing

[03:31:29] okay so those were mr. Bates's questions that he asked mr. Amos asked several questions which I think all of you were copied on I'm only going to answer the ones that we can answer this evening I'm not gonna try to answer all of them the so he asked about estimating the impact of the looming tariff war and cost of materials is there a way to assess this ahead of budget adoption to have the most up-to-date information I'm not sure how we were just that's more of a wait-and-see but where that's part where that will more likely impact this is on capital projects and and those of

[03:32:09] course are bid out and experience tells me that contractors are going to cover themselves over the potential spikes and if it costs for tariffs which will basically lead to higher bids that's that's where I think that's that's probably the most likely outcome of that his next question is can the meals tax be raised above the six percent level the answer is yes it can be if you would like and can we add a sunset provision like the town of Vienna did and the answer is so what I understand is you they increased it and but they put a

[03:32:47] sunset on the increase for a certain period of time so so if council desires that that is certainly something that could be done if you wish to put a some type of limitation sunset limitation on the increase that could be done as well how can it quickly can we update the charter to increase the transit occupancy tax you can do that the next time you have to amend the charter for anything besides that would be next January or a year basically a year from now January of 2026 and if that were to pass it would be effective July

[03:33:22] 1 of 2026 which is the start of the fiscal 27 the start of the fiscal 27 year so if it was and we would know if the we would know by the by budget adoption or that you need to whether the charter if that we were on to pursue that if a charter change was done and to where you could have that I would also so certainly a good revenue source but it's not going to raise but so much because we have a limited number

[03:33:54] of hotels in the city I think you asked if we approve the nine-and-a-half what would potentially be the tax recreation for 27 we obviously don't have crystal ball what I did tell you was that we are very confident that from a debt perspective if you adopt how we've proposed with the revenue stream that we're saying you can dedicate towards debt you won't have to do anything for debt you may have to do something for operating but you wouldn't have to do anything for debt we're fairly confident on that so just to make make

[03:34:30] that distinction you asked about could we have deferred tax payments for furloughed or fired federal workers is that possible then I'm sorry the answer is no that goes back to the Dillon rule we can only do what the state allows us so they're prescribed programs for such as elderly disabled veterans but just but any other programs the state would have to authorize that and so that unfortunately is not an option for us you asked about unassigned fund balances And, again, you wanted to, could we use some maybe that for a tax relief program?

[03:35:09] And, again, the answer to that is no. I'm sorry. Because, again, it goes back to the state does not give us permission to do that.

[03:35:24] Can we separate the rates on the senior centers to process the county separately at a different rate? The answer is yes, but I believe we do reciprocity. So that has been the longstanding arrangement. if you so the if we did that then i think the issue is that they do the same for our residents the you asked for updates to a ppe for fire station number three so we do have some information out uh requesting information about potential opportunities those are due later this month

[03:36:02] we'll be coming back to council it's for the pop it's not for specific proposals but basically are there options where we're finding out for the market you know are there options since that we could then pursue um um and then you asked about a budget town hall which we've discussed um this evening and we will work to get that done he had other questions which we will work on but this was the bulk of his questions i do i appreciate you answering that many questions

[03:36:35] anyway so thanks there you're very welcome quickly um excuse me let me pull this up um councilman council member hall let me pull up her message to me excuse me just one second you have a question

[03:37:11] about the um you had the question about um the comparison for inflation and which we talked about earlier so we will work on on that and and get that out um to you um um and then specifically she asked a question about the throne restrooms so in fiscal the fiscal year just ended

[03:37:50] through 2024 the the entire year was 164 000 for and that had what i would say permanent if you will or every month um at ots van dyke and the vice park and then part of the

[03:38:17] year in providence and ratcliffe and um the the but a portion of those um the the two seasonal ones they are able to take from the summer camp expenses which adds which allows them to add additional weeks of contracted camps and so about 45 000 of that was that's how that was covered so that was the so that was the actual cost for so for the last fiscal year the last complete

[03:38:55] fiscal year and the only comment i would make about that going back to who shows up at town halls to advocate for things is that you don't necessarily get the people whose kids went to the rec pack programs who had a place to wash their hands before they ate lunch and an all outdoor program showing up to say how much that expense meant to their kids having a good summer outdoor rec program so again we have to look at when we put these things out there and they are important and we want to hear from people we're not necessarily going to hear from people who are the people

[03:39:33] using these services or who benefit the most from these services i totally agree um and my son almost went to the ratcliffe park and toilet was not the reason why he was going to go but it was a huge part of it i mean it's very nice to have but i'm thinking from a how are they working out where are they working where are they getting used used so just trying to understand as much as we can about each of the toilets

where they are right so that's where they are and that was the the cost for the year and then the one that was 164 for the year and my understanding is that with the

[03:40:11] renovations to old town hall i think the expectation is the ots one will go away because there'll be facilities access from the outside as part of the old town hall renovation so that's one that would be removed and there was one that had been at thighs park next to the trail which will be removed because we're going to build bathrooms at Theis Park. Does removed mean removed or does removed mean moved somewhere else and still have the cost? Not necessarily. I mean, I think the one at Theis, I don't know that they've moved the one at Theis Park. I think they've taken it out for maintenance. I think the only two we have right now are at Van Dyke Park and Old Town Hall.

[03:40:50] Theis Park will have permanent bathrooms. Old Town Hall will build permanent bathrooms for Old Town Square. So that leaves the one at Van Dyke Park. And at such time as we do Van Dyke park as part of the cip bathrooms are in that plan just like there are bathrooms for the catherine johnson middle school fields because building bathrooms in my opinion is a must-have not a nice to have but the throne bathrooms were a nice bridge while we figure out how we're going to fund bathrooms that really should have been built you know decades ago um but we're doing it now and so you're going to see the throne bathrooms disappear i mean as we get permanent bathrooms i think you'll

[03:41:30] probably see them back for the rec pack programs again this summer because it makes providence park and radcliffe more usable for all day programs so i mean i i agree people need to understand why these things matter it's a it's a quality of life level of service decision i mean we've had porta potties out there for a long time but that's not everybody's idea of a pleasant way to spend time in our city and as far as children go i just think hand washing is a really important thing. I totally agree. And I will say that the soccer tournament that we ran at Draper Drive

[03:42:07] Park immediately after those bathrooms were installed was absolutely amazing. I mean, I was literally emailing with, I believe it was Kathy Salgado then saying, is it going to be ready? And she was like, we have another inspection on Thursday. I'm like, great, because it's on Saturday and Sunday. So it was fantastic. Again, just want to understand because I'm sure it's buried in other somewhere. So do you know what the cost is for 2025 and rejected for 2026 right now by chance we can get that for you i don't i listen i don't this was not

[03:42:38] provided when i asked a question for the expense so we can get that for you and then um council member hardy chandler didn't ask a specific question as far as numbers but she mentioned about the values and as we were going through i have an opportunity to discuss those which so as we have these conversations we can certainly do that again just to reiterate we're having that discussion at the April 5th work session I believe that is all the questions that and I'm looking at the rest if somebody said you just remind me I'll pull them

[03:43:12] up believe this all I've got we've gotten so far and again I think all of you have signed up for one-on-one conversations so we can actually bring your book we can go through it and in as much detail as possible and answer some of your specific questions like you where we can pull it up on the screen and show you like some of the maybe finer details that's not in your book to sort of give you an idea and would encourage you to as you continue to go through or if you hear from constituents you know with

[03:43:50] questions if you'll just send them to us and again just like we did this evening we will answer them in the public setting so everybody can hear what they are just getting them in advance it's just helpful

for us to try and get you the answers um as timely as possible so we're not you ask us in one meeting and then we have to wait a whole meeting to to get you an answer so um i don't know if gwen or jc i think we've covered everything is there anything we you all wanted to cover we

[03:44:20] haven't covered or did we miss anything no sir okay so um that is so are there other questions or things even if we can't answer it this right at this moment that you will want to put out for us to be working on councilmember Peterson not for tonight but back to an observation councilmember Bates made earlier with regards to police and public safety there was a fairly extensive management

[03:44:56] consulting report delivered last fall number of recommendations would be helpful to know to what extent they are reflected in the budget if not where not and why not and I think more generally from the perspective of the chief how well does the budget reflect the necessary priorities of that department okay we'll get that for you as much if I root I have had reviewed a little bit Certainly the executive summary of the study.

[03:45:36] And so my recollection is that it is not actually adding positions. It's reallocating and restructuring the headcount that we already have. That doesn't mean there's not a fiscal impact, but I don't believe that that study actually required additional positions.

[03:45:53] It was reallocating the same headcount in a different fashion, but I will confirm that. Yeah, I think the overriding issue is whether the budget places that department at full capacity in terms of the city's needs. Councilmember Bates.

[03:46:12] My understanding was that there were different components to it. And I thought it was the same consultant. It might have been different consultants. I don't know. But my understanding was that one sort of component of it was making recommendations on the organizational structure and all that is, yeah, you know, the restructuring of existing positions.

[03:46:35] but then there was also a recommendation on increased staffing levels. Yeah, that's my recollection, too, but it was several years out. It was like year one, year two, year three. So we'll get you in. I don't want to talk out of school, so we'll review it and get your answers.

[03:46:54] But I do think the system is good, is we have questions and emailing it, so it makes our time very productive when we get in the room and have a discussion that you've had plenty of time to look at it get the details so we make our in-person time really productive i i think that would suit all of us so as you have these thoughts just send them and they'll be added to the list so that when we get together for the work sessions we can we can run through them sure just a general question obviously there's been a lot of arpa funds that are applied in many years and they're

[03:47:28] all going to terminate the um cip the other things that are beyond that and and any budget conversations in general those have assumed that those funds are no longer there and we need to replace them with operating funds or some sort of other capital management sure so ARPA funds were one-time use funds the majority of that went to CIP projects specifically in stormwater also parks and recreation there was revenue replacement that was utilized once as you saw tonight some of those funds went to transit which was allowed but beyond that there are no

[03:48:07] no FTEs, there are no ongoing operating costs associated with ARPA. They've all been obligated, they're all projected to be spent before the deadline, which I want to say is December 30, December of 2026. Okay, sorry, I think, so specifically for stormwater, there was 1.5 for 2025, there was 1.4

for 2026. The tax rate that has been suggested for stormwater is expecting that we don't have any more influxes, and now we need to start to carry that on our own entirely, right correct correct and just since you mentioned the CIP and that's one of the

[03:48:46] things we have suggested as a topic for the next work session just just as a general comment we can review projects and and answer questions so that a project specific would do the best that we can if we need to bring in staff to for for more detailed follow-up we can certainly do that what I want to make sure that that council understands is that simply canceling a project moving a project to another

[03:49:17] year does not impact the budget proposal for this year the only way you're going to impact that is to reduce the cash contribution that is made to the cip so we make a cash contribution every year of 11 plus million dollars the rest is debt funded that is part of our plan of finance if you recall from when davenport was here and if you go look at their presentation we can we can provide that slide to you again one of the point one is one of the assumptions is that there's a

[03:49:55] minimum of 11 million dollars transferred in cash every year to fund the cip the cip is obviously much more expensive than that and that's where the debt piece comes in you also have a financial policy that says that you will contribute at least five percent of general fund expenditures the equivalent to it to the cip that's all part of of why we have a triple a bond rating all of those things are interplay so if you're wanting to change the CIP and your goal

[03:50:33] is to reduce what the tax rate is for the budget simply changing projects is not going to do that you have to view what we will have to reduce the cash contribution to the CIP so I just want to put that out there as you're thinking that oh maybe we can move this project or do something different if you want to do that that's still fine um you know those that will ultimately impact how much how much we may spend over time uh on specific things but in terms of impacting this budget that's that's in front of you you're going to have to reduce the cash contribution i just want to make sure that that

[03:51:12] that everybody understood that so understanding that i would like to task you if everyone else is an agreement of maybe coming up with three or five ideas that could be trimmed in our operating expenses that could potentially help us lower the tax rate for this year we can certainly do that we can again we can we can give you a list of things sure i mean i can pull them out myself

[03:51:48] but i don't i don't know the impact that they'll have so if some educated conversation could occur about a few key things that would be really great thank you excuse me just for clarification that I'm assuming you're referring to things in the operating budget.

[03:52:07] Yes, recognizing that capital improvements will change things over time, but not for an immediate tax deco. Okay, that's just for clarification, thank you. Council Member Hardy-Chandler. While adding, I think, the triple bond rating, the double-triple bond rating that we have we want to maintain so that there are far-reaching consequences, just articulating those along the way.

[03:52:34] That's what we've certainly tried. And how we structure, again, how we structure fits into all of that. So the creation of debt capacity and all of those things fit right in with that. And I think Davenport is planning on just sending their, just so you know, basically their confirmation that, yes, what's being proposed and how it's structured fits in with the plan of finance, and they would certainly recommend that purely from that financial perspective.

[03:53:04] that they're not making a value judgment on programs just purely from how things are funded and i think that's is that not forthcoming jc it is all right anything else for the good of the body budget just in general anything else you'd like to to add add or offer when will we uh see an agenda for our next work session when will that be posted miss clark potentially tomorrow

[03:53:42] Okay, so one of the issues in our session, as I understand it, and this is a discussion about the George Snyder Trail and trails in general, and I sent an email around earlier suggesting a thought process and some key questions to get answered, and I guess the question is how best to go about doing that because I think it would be helpful to identify those important questions in advance and have the staff be in a position to respond to them so that we can have that information available during the meeting itself.

[03:54:21] So that could happen perhaps by us submitting those questions under that kind of format. But I just thought I'd check because I think that there will be potentially a number of questions and it will be very important for us to get fairly clear staff responses on them.

[03:54:40] Sure. I mean, it's on the work session to discuss the George Snyder's Net Trail. So a presentation will be made by staff just as an overview, but it's a discussion. So if there's specific things anybody on this dais wants answered, it is to everyone's benefit to email staff to ask them that.

[03:54:58] Like if you want something specific, they can show up prepared to speak to exactly what this dais wants to understand about the George Schneider Trail. But they're just going to lead off by just doing sort of an abbreviated overview of where we started, what has happened, and where we are.

[03:55:14] But I definitely think if you've got something you absolutely have to know, tell them in advance. How far in advance, I think, is, you know, because they generally try to post the presentations within a week.

[03:55:29] But if there's something that they need to amend, they can amend their presentation and they will send it out to us. I mean, that's, I'm looking at you, that's generally how it's happened previously, right? Yes, we try to always post on Wednesday afternoon. and sometimes it's Thursday, and we typically post the presentations with that.

[03:55:49] However, when we've gotten amended presentations, we send that to you when we receive them and we post it on Uranicus. Yeah, so you've got time to submit your questions, but if they need to do an updated presentation, they'll do it as far and as advanced as they can so you're not looking at it the day of the meeting, if that's your question.

[03:56:08] I want to give them time, but I also need some additional time to process some of the stuff from Friday. Right. I think in that regard, we try to be as flexible and responsive as possible, both the staff and answering things and just understanding. They want to get it out ahead of time, so you have time to look at the presentation and the staff report.

[03:56:25] But if things change, they will update it and give you a more updated presentation. If there's additional slides or there's additional anything, you'll get a newer version of the presentation. And can they do that if we submit questions even over the weekend?

[03:56:43] Yeah, I think so. I'm going to speak for staff. I think so. They're going to do their best. But even if it's not in an amended presentation with a slide, they'll come prepared to answer the question.

Absolutely. They'll come prepared to answer the question. So if you have thoughts over the weekend, just email them to staff.

[03:57:01] Yeah, certainly we may not, you likely won't get a response over the weekend, but certainly send it to us and we will be ready to work on that and have it ready for you for Tuesday. For Tuesday, yeah. One, I will say, too, the future list, we keep that updated consistently throughout the day.

[03:57:19] So looking forward for the next several couple of months out, you can see sort of what's coming ahead, and you can let staff know well in advance what you may be interested in so it's not, like, such a... Where can they find the future list? Does everybody know where the future...

[03:57:37] I will send the email later. My computer just died, but I will send it to... later sorry there is there there is a there is a future list and so that would be a good thing for her to send the link because when we put things in we decide that we'll do it in april or we'll do it in may or we'll do it in june that's all out there and so you do get an idea of sort of what's in the pipeline and that gives yeah it gives everybody a chance to say okay this is in the pipeline and this is what i'd like to specifically know about the thing we're talking about in two months right right yes council member amos has absolutely nothing to do with this i just wanted to thank facets and all the religious partners for hosting hypothermia prevention week

[03:58:16] which is wrapping up i think either this week or next week so it's wrapping up soon um so yeah just want to say thanks for that and uh hope to see y'all at the mosby woods luncheon on saturday if y'all can make it yeah yeah yeah it's on my calendar all right is there anything else for the good of the body before we call this party to a close oh okay i'm looking around okay i'm I'm adjourning this meeting at 10:59 p.m.



Coraggio Consulting · aguyonx.com