

County Council of Dorchester County
Regular Session Minutes
May 9, 2023

The County Council of Dorchester County convened in Open Session in Room 110 of the County Office Building at 6:01 p.m. on the 9th day of May, 2023. A roll call of the members was conducted. Present in Room 110 were: George L. Pfeffer, Jr., President; Mike Detmer, Vice President; Rob Kramer, Jr.; William V. Nichols; Ricky C. Travers. Also present in Room 110 was Jeff Powell, Interim County Manager; Donna F. Lane, Chief of Staff; and, Irene Barnes, Executive Administrative Specialist.

REGULAR SESSION

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Councilman Pfeffer led the invocation and the pledge of allegiance.

FINANCIAL REPORT: CASH AND INVESTMENTS

Councilman Pfeffer reported total cash and investments as \$28,238,149.91.

APPROVAL OF DISBURSEMENTS

The Council approved the vouchers as presented, with Councilman Detmer abstaining from payments made to APG.

PUBLIC HEARING – FY2023-2024 BUDGET

The Council convened into a budget public hearing. Ms. Lane said this is the second public hearing on the proposed FY2024 Budget, after which Council can make changes. Ms. Lane advised that a legislative public hearing/adoption is scheduled for May 16, 2022 at 6:02 p.m.

Sandra Tripp-Jones, Budget Manager, presented a brief overview of the proposed FY24 budget.

Councilman Pfeffer stated that individuals signed up to speak on the proposed budget.

Dr. Clifford P. Coppersmith, President, Chesapeake College, thanked the Council for supporting Chesapeake College and gave a brief update on the Commercial Driver's License training.

Glen Payne, Sr., resident and Retired Maryland State Police Officer, expressed his support of the salary increases for the Sheriff's sworn officers and towards the Board of Education's requests.

W. David Bromwell, Superintendent of Schools, thanked Council for working with the Board of Education on the Maintenance of Effort. He said: 1) he understands that the \$3 million Kirwan mandate has been difficult for the County; 2) Maryland Association of Counties is working on addressing the Kirwan directive; 3) the school redesign planning process has been paused until after summer for a review of all school buildings to determine which can be renovated or changed and which will need to be replaced; 4) he supports having School Resource Officers in every school building for safety purposes; and, 5) the Board of Education's website will be an open forum to allow comments during the review.

Dr. Susan Morgan, President of the Board of Education Board, echoed Mr. Bromwell's comments.

With no additional comments, the Council closed the public hearing.

Mr. Tripp-Jones asked for guidance on salary increases and presented the following recommendations:

1. Increase all positions under minimum wage to \$15 per hour and then provide a 3% increase in July;
2. A cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) of 3% in July 2023 for all employees earning less than \$60,000;
3. COLA 2% in July 2023 for all employees earning over than \$60,000; and
4. Increase salaries of all sworn Officers within the Sheriff's Office by \$10,000 as of July 1, 2023.

James W. Phillips, Jr., Sheriff, spoke in favor of the increases in sworn officers pay, noting that Dorchester County is \$10,000 behind other counties' starting salary.

Councilman Pfeffer recognized that there are discipline issues within the schools, however there are restraints on the budget due to the Kirwan mandate. He stated that the County cannot compete with other counties but is working on parity and he has agreed to conduct a compensation study to review salaries, benefits and overtime thresholds.

The Council reached a consensus on the four recommendations, presented by Ms. Tripp-Jones.

Ms. Tripp-Jones advised Council she needs additional guidance on how to split the \$35,000 that was set aside within the contingency reserves for non-profit organizations. Councilman Pfeffer said the Council is budgeting funds with the best interest of the County in mind and is unsure if funds will be available to assist.

INTERIM COUNTY MANAGER'S COMMENTS

Mr. Powell stated that the focus is on making improvements and addressing structural issues for the betterment of the County. He noted that different options are being considered to provide additional benefits to employees. Mr. Powell noted that he made the recommendation on the salary increases.

The Council approved the request of Mr. Powell to provide a letter of support to Mike Starling to relocate WHCP, a public radio station, to Race Street, instead of the Packing House, due to the cost of rent.

COUNCIL'S COMMENTS

Pursuant to a query from Councilman Kramer, Dave Edwards, Public Works Director, said that he appreciates the consensus on the salary increases which he believes is a step in the right direction.

Councilman Travers stated that with the Kirwan mandate, the decision before Council was wants versus needs. He said funding should have been identified before the plan was approved, and cited concerns about an increase in property taxes next if funds are not available to cover Blueprint costs to the County.

Councilman Detmer said it is Public Service Recognition Week and thanked: 1) staff and law enforcement for their service; and, 2) Mr. Powell and Ms. Tripp-Jones for completing the proposed budget without having to increase taxes. He stated that it is imperative for everyone to reach out to the

State Legislators to make them aware that the Kirwan mandate is negatively impacting the Counties. He asked residents to continue to provide feedback so the Council can address their concerns.

Councilman Pfeffer expressed thanks to those who attended the budget public hearings and he announced that employees will be provided pizza on Friday in observance of Public Service Recognition Week.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Wes Jones, Deputy, Sheriff's Office, thanked Council for their serious consideration of the Sheriff's sworn Officers salary increases.

John Stichberry, Chief Deputy, Sheriff's Office, expressed his appreciation for the increase and noted that they will be losing two people next year to retirement. He added that the City of Cambridge has about 15 vacancies.

Mr. Payne cited concerns about the hazards of police officers and teachers face and their safety.

Dr. Stafford applauded the Council for their hard work and effort. She stressed the need for an educated group of citizens and law enforcement.

ADJOURNMENT

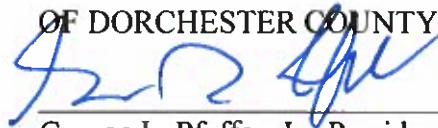
With no further business to discuss, the Council adjourned.

ATTEST:

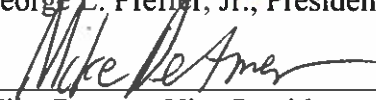


Jeff Powell
Interim County Manager

THE COUNTY COUNCIL
OF DORCHESTER COUNTY:



George L. Pfeffer, Jr., President



Mike Detmer, Vice President



Rob Kramer, Jr.



William V. Nichols



Ricky C. Travers

Approved the 6th day of June, 2023.