

WORK SESSION OF THE GREENBELT CITY COUNCIL

Held Monday, March 18, 2024

Meeting: Prince George's County Councilmember Ingrid Watson

Mayor Jordan started the meeting at 7:30 p.m. On site Council Chambers and via Zoom.

In attendance were: Councilmembers Amy E. Knesel, Danielle P. McKinney, Jenni A. Pompei, Silke I. Pope, Rodney M. Roberts, Kristen L.K. Weaver, and Mayor Emmett V. Jordan.

City Staff: Josué Salmerón, City Manager; Jamarie Spencer, Public Information Producer and Bonita Anderson, City Clerk.

Others present: Mayor Jordan began the meeting by introducing the City Council, staff, and Prince George's County Councilmember Ingrid Watson.

Pending County and State Legislation

Councilmember Watson is dedicated to enhancing quality of life for the residents of her community. She has been working closely with the City Council to support the people of Charlestown North and is currently researching legislation to further this initiative alongside City Manager Salmeron. One of her primary focuses is addressing the challenges faced by senior citizens, especially those at risk of eviction or in need of new housing. Although securing immediate funding for these efforts has been challenging, she is collaborating with various organizations to obtain the necessary support.

Additionally, she referenced a County bill on rent stabilization, sponsored by Councilmember Krystal Oriadha which aims to extend current three (3) percent cap for an additional six months. Each County Councilmember is now submitting requests for permanent legislation. Furthermore, Councilmember Watson has met with owners of Franklin Park, and County Council is evaluating Montgomery County's rent stabilization proposals as a benchmark for Prince George's County.

Councilmember Watson is committed to staying updated on latest developments in District 4. Education and environmental policies are among her top priorities. She is especially proud of her involvement in launching a reusable bag campaign, which includes implementing a ban on plastic bags.

Additionally, Councilmember Watson emphasized the urgent issue of crime in the community. She discussed a recent crime forum held in November 2023 to address these concerns. Currently, the County Council is in discussions with state officials regarding this matter. A significant juvenile crime bill has moved from the House to the Senate, and its progress will be closely monitored as the legislative session approaches its end in about three weeks.

Initial Comments on the County Executive Budget Proposal

Councilmember Watson addressed the proposed FY2025 County Budget, highlighting that the deficit is approximately one percent larger this year. As a result of this deficit, the county will be freezing over 800 open and funded positions, and there may be budget cuts for agencies outside of schools and public safety.

Schools

Councilmember Watson announced that the reconstruction of Springhill Lake Elementary School is progressing as scheduled. There will be an update regarding the plans for Dora Kennedy French Immersion School (DKFI). Some members of the City Council have expressed concerns about the preservation of DKFI.

The current plan is for DKFI to temporarily relocate and share space with Robert Goddard Montessori School. During this time, Springhill Lake Elementary School will occupy the former DKFI building for two years while the new Springhill Lake School is being constructed. Councilmembers have raised concerns about the habitability of the DKFI building, as it will be used by students.

Health

Mayor Jordan inquired about the new wing at Luminis Medical Center. Councilmember Watson, who serves on the county council's Health, Human Services, and Public Safety Committee, noted that the Cheverly Health Clinic will be relocating to Greenbelt, off Edmonston Road. She stated that relocation of the health center is progressing, and it is scheduled to open in the spring of 2026.

DPIE Issues

Councilmember Watson has been collaborating closely with all Homeowners Associations (HOAs) in District 4. Recently, a successful roundtable was held, during which Department of Permitting, Inspections, and Enforcement (DPIE) shared information specifically about permitting for homeowners. The presentation materials are available on the county website.

DPWT Issues

Mayor Jordan inquired about County Bill 15, which aims to update zoning laws and allow certain types of developments, such as townhouses and multifamily buildings, to proceed. He noted that communities in Greenbelt, located outside the Beltway, have more influence in negotiating amenities for new buildings compared to those inside the Beltway.

There was a discussion concerning potential funding cuts for WMATA as well as TheBus and Metrobus routes 11, 16, and 15x. Councilmember Watson clarified that routes 11, 16, and 15x are not under consideration for elimination, and the County is actively opposing the proposed WMATA cuts to these bus routes.

Councilmember Watson emphasized that improving road infrastructure for the Greenbelt Road corridor is a priority, especially in light of the new FBI headquarters. This issue has been highlighted by both the County Council and the County Executive.

Crime and Public Safety

Councilmember Watson reported that the Police Accountability Board is functioning well, but there are concerns about potential cuts to its funding in the new budget.

Ms. Pope inquired about the plan to remove firefighters from the Beltsville Station. Councilmember Watson stated she was unaware of any specific plans to eliminate career firefighters but will follow up with the Fire Chief for clarification.

Ms. Pope also asked about the progress of the feasibility study for the North County Animal Shelter. Mayor Pro -Tem Weaver mentioned that the City Council has received a copy of the study from City Manager Salmeron and will forward it to Councilmember Watson for further follow-up.

Councilmember Watson will also address Mayor Jordan's question regarding the status of implementing the capital bike share program at the metro station and Roosevelt High School.

Ms. Pompei raised concerns about securing ongoing funding for the Blueprint for Education from the County, noting that the funding should increase each year. Councilmember Watson responded that she would gather more information about the tax revenue related to the Blueprint to share with the Council.

Follow up

- Councilmember Watson will provide the City with hearing dates for the County's proposed budget.
- Councilmember Watson will provide the City with additional information on the availability of beds in northern homeless shelters.
- Councilmember Watson will follow up with Fire Chief about career firefighters at the Beltsville station.
- Status of a North County Animal shelter (Feasibility Study conducted 6 years ago)
- Status of the bike share installation at the Metro and Roosevelt High School.

There were some informational items discussed. The meeting ended at 9:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Bonita Anderson

Bonita Anderson
City Clerk