BUDGET WORK SESSION OF THE GREENBELT CITY COUNCIL
Held Wednesday, April 2, 2025

Discussion: Public Works and Capital Projects, FY 2026 Proposed Budget

Mayor Jordan started the meeting at 7:30 p.m., held on the Council Chambers and via Zoom.

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

City Staff: Josué Salmerón, City Manager; Tim George, Assistant City Manager; Bertha Gaymon, Treasurer; Brian Kim, Director of Public Works; Brian Townsend, Assistant Director of Publics Works; Kevin Carpenter-Driscoll, Environmental Coordinator; Terri Hruby, Director of Planning and Community Development; Chondria Andrews, Public Information and Communication Coordinator and Shaniya Lashley-Mullen, Deputy City Clerk.

Others present: Judith Davis, Michael Hartman, Bill Orleans and others.

Public Works Budget Work Session

The council held a work session to discuss the City's proposed FY2026 budget focusing on the Public Works Department and Capital Projects Fund. The Council acknowledged the significant role of the Public Works Department in maintaining the City's infrastructure and services. Mr. Salmerón highlighted the Department's efforts in managing the proposed FY2026 budget and sustaining substantial reductions including holding key positions vacant. The Council appreciated the Public Works staff's dedication and leadership in balancing the budget.

City Budget and Waste Collection Fees

The meeting focused on the City's proposed FY2026 budget and waste collection fees. Mr. Salmerón discussed the need for adjustments due to inflation and the Compensation Study results. He also cited a 20% increase in tipping fees from the County. Mr. Kim discussed increased costs of trash removal. Mr. Kim also highlighted the City's solar farm, which is expected to offset 60% of the City's electricity consumption and the City's grant target achievement. Mayor Jordan discussed potential for a Council visit to the solar farm once it's operational. There was discussion on the City's energy contract and potential savings from the solar farm.

Public Works Department Staffing and Budget

Mr. Salmerón discusses staffing changes, including temporarily removing some positions due to budget constraints. Brian Kim, now Director of Operations, has taken on additional responsibilities with minimal impact on overtime. Mr. Salmerón stated that Public Works staff continues to provide custodial services for the Greenbelt Cinema and Roosevelt Center, with slight increases in costs due to personnel and electricity charges. Mr. Kim shared the Department priorities' transition to electric equipment when the budget allows. Playground maintenance includes weekly and quarterly inspections, with a recently certified staff member taking an aggressive approach. Ms. Weaver also mentioned the playground near Gardenway needed attention because of bare spots.

Waste Collection Service Improvement Proposals

Mr. Salmerón acknowledges a structural deficit in trash pickup fees and is considering proposals to address it. The Council discussed three proposals to improve waste collection services. The first proposal involves a two-year rate increase to reduce the overall deficit. The second proposal is a pay-as-you-throw model, which has proven successful in other jurisdictions and would incentivize residents to reduce waste. The third proposal integrates the composting program into the waste collection service model. Mayor Jordan expressed interest in these proposals and the potential for long-term savings and waste reduction.

Road Maintenance and Deterrent Cameras

Mr. Salmerón discussed the City's road maintenance and resurfacing budget, noting that the amount planned for next year was less than the past couple of years. He also discussed sidewalk construction, with a significant amount completed in the previous fiscal year. Based on a question asked by Ms. McKinney. Mr. Carpenter-Driscoll addressed the issue of people dumping trash at the recycling center with the cost falling under personnel expenses. Mr. Salmerón discussed the loss of a trailer due to an accident and the need to replace it with a proposal to install fixed cameras at the location. He expressed satisfaction with the deterrent effect of the cameras on illegal dumping.

City Projects and Funding Discussion

Based on a question asked by Mayor Jordan, Mr. Salmerón answered that the new flashing lights at stop signs were confirmed to be part of the bike Pedestrian Improvements project funded by ARPA and Mr. Kim added that Planning and Community Development Department spearheaded the project. Mayor Jordan inquired about the installation of speed humps on Crescent Road, and Mr. Salmerón stated that there were no plans for additional installations in the future. Mr. Kim added that the Public Works Department would install a solar-powered pedestrian walkway on Hanover Parkway. There was discussion regarding the City's traffic lights, particularly the one in front of Green Ridge House, which did not meet current specifications and had no plans for replacement in the current budget. The City's sidewalk construction increased in FY 2025 and possibility of state-shared revenues for FY 2026 spending discussed. The number of bus stops made accessible was offered by Ms. Weaver who suggested keeping a tally of how many need improvements as part of performance measurements. Ms. Hruby replied from the Capital Projects fund in the last two years due to ARPA funding. However, staff are improving 59 bus stops with ARPA funding. She added that there has been enhanced accessibility as some reconstruction projects upgraded the pad sites. The City's performance metrics were also discussed and Ms. Weaver suggested more granular data on bus stop accessibility and other improvements.

Accessibility Issues in City Planning

Michael Hartman, 2 Gardenway, raised accessibility issues in the City, including snow removal and curb cuts. Mr. Kim and Mr. Salmerón acknowledged the need for better training and awareness among staff and the importance of hiring a subject matter expert on disabilities. Mr. Salmerón also discussed the need for better digital accessibility, such as searchable PDF files and text in social media posts. Judith Davis, Greenbelt East suggested underperformance measures on page 167 including the number of maintenance tickets received and number of responses. She inquired about the tipping fee and MERV rate. Mr. Salmerón answered that the tipping fee has increased to $85.00, MERV rate is still the same.

EV Charging Stations in Marginalized Areas

Mayor Jordan inquired about the emphasis on EV charging stations in marginalized areas and current charging station model. Mr. Salmerón answered that the city has some oversight of the station outside the Municipal Building and receives a payment to offset electricity consumption. He noted recommendations will be brought forward to Council on running the program, whether the city should be service provider or outsource it to third party entity. The current model with Pepco has been an issue with stations not always working. The city plans to add EV charging stations to Buddy Attic Park and is considering outsourcing the project. The plan is to deliver 10 EV charging stations in June. The city also finds data collection and reliability of the charging stations.

2026 Budget and Infrastructure Projects

Mayor Jordan inquired about allocation for Pepco Street lights and potential financing model for LED converted lights. Mr. Salmerón answered that information is not incorporated in the proposed FY2026 budget because the city doesn't have an agreement with Pepco. There was discussion regarding the Capital Reserve Fund project and Vision Zero Action plan which Ms. Hruby noted is a federal grant under review. Mayor Jordan and Ms. Hruby shared that the Hanover Parkway off-road bicycle facility project is funded through ARPA and is in 90% design phase. The Cemetery Preservation Master Plan contract was recently awarded. Lastly, the Red Oak Mitigation Plan was introduced as a stormwater project in partnership with the State of Maryland.

Waterline Project Cost and Solutions

Ms. Pope inquired about the dog park's water supply. Mr. Salmerón explained the plans to reach out to contractors for updated pricing. The Council discussed the challenges of a waterline project with a potential cost of $120,000.00.

They considered two methods:

- a water-capturing system or a container treated with chlorine tablets. The long-term solution might be a dedicated water line which would be expensive.

- Council members debated the necessity of providing clean water for dogs at the dog park, with some suggesting that people should bring their water.

Greenbelt Cinema and the Connecting Trail Project Updates

Mayor Jordan and Mr. George responded to the Greenbelt Cinema project sharing that it includes various sub-projects such as bathroom renovations display screen installations and lighting improvements. The project is awaiting approval from the Maryland Historical Trust and is expected to take less than a year to complete once approved. Ms. Hruby explained that the connecting trail between Greenbelt Station and the Metro station is now moving forward after being put on hold during FBI discussions. The project is expected to be bid out in the summer or early fall with construction potentially starting by the end of 2022. She stated that staff are working on finalizing responses to comments received from the state and revising the budget.

The project costs around $3 million with a 20% contingency. Staff are also working on securing funding for projects including a $1.5 million TAP Grant and $1 million Capital Grant.

Funding Status of Various Projects Pool Deck Project and Shelter Progress

There was a discussion regarding the Greenbrook trail project, which Ms. Hruby stated is currently in a planning phase and not on the capital improvement project list. Ms. Davis discussed the Gateway Signage and Lighting Project which Ms. Hruby stated was funded but later removed from the list due to duplication. Mayor Jordan discussed the welcome signs for the city, which are currently unacceptable and need to be redesigned. The TIF (Tax Increment Financing) fund was discussed and mentioned that the TIF has appreciated over time. Ms. Hruby noted that staff would be researching additional grant funding to implement the Wayfinding Plan.

Based on a question asked by Mayor Jordan, Mr. Kim provided an update on the progress of the pool deck project, which is set to start on April 7, 2025. There were also discussions about the opening of the outdoor pool, which is expected around May 5, 2025, estimated repair time is September and team is working hard to meet the deadline.

Informational Items

Ms. Pope requested an update on the Animal Shelter and Mr. Salmerón and Mr. Kim provided an update on the Animal Shelter's progress with partial operations starting and ongoing work on the HVAC system and flooring. Mr. Roberts raised concerns about a potential road project in the Beaver Dam area which could impact bike riders and recreational users. Mayor Jordan requested Mr. Salmerón to check in with BARC regarding changes in federal staffing and layoffs.
The meeting ended at 9:21 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Shaniya Lashley-Mullen

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Deputy City Clerk