BUDGET WORK SESSION OF THE GREENBELT CITY COUNCIL held Wednesday, April 8, 2026, to discuss the Overview, Revenues & General Government, Other Funds, Non-Departmental & Fund Transfers, Economic Development, Planning and Community Development, FY2027 Proposed Budget.

Mayor Pro Tem Weaver started the meeting at 7:30 p.m. The meeting was held at the Council Chambers of the Municipal Building, 25 Crescent Road, and via Zoom.

PRESENT WERE: Councilmembers Frankie S. Fritz, Amy E. Knesel, Danielle P. McKinney, Jenni A. Pompi, Silke I. Pope, and Mayor Pro Tem Kristen L.K. Weaver. Mayor Emmett V. Jordan absent due to travels.

STAFF PRESENT WERE: Josué Salmerón, City Manager; Tim George, Assistant City Manager; Ronald Covington, City Treasurer; Terri Hruby, Director of Planning and Community Development; Gilberto Cabrera, Assistant Director of Community Development; and Shaniya Lashley-Mullen, Deputy City Clerk.

OTHERS PRESENT WERE: Bill Orleans, Michael Hartman, Judith Davis, and others.

Planning and Community Development

The Greenbelt City Council held their first budget work session for FY2027, focusing on General Government, Planning and Community Development, Other Funds, Non-Departmental and Fun Transfers, and Economic Development sections. Ms. Hruby, Director of Planning and Community Development, highlighted ongoing projects including Vision Zero implementation, Hanover Parkway Bicycle Facility Designs, and the Cemetery Master Plan, while noting that the department's budget remained similar to the previous year with only increases for merit and COLA adjustments. Ms. Hruby and Councilmember Pompi discussed potential updates to Code Enforcement fines, including the possibility of increasing the fine cap from $1,000 to $5,000.

The Council discussed challenges with the current eviction notification ordinance, Ms. Hruby noting that while it requires 3-day prior notification, limited resources make it difficult to assist residents by the time notifications are received. Councilmembers agreed that the ordinance needs amendment to enable earlier intervention and initiative-taking relationships with apartment complexes, rather than focusing solely on increasing fines. The discussion revealed that while the City is fully staffed except for the unfunded supervisory inspector position, improving software and technology could enhance efficiency, though previous American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding requests for technology upgrades were not approved.

FY2027 Budget Discussion

Mr. Covington, the City Treasurer, presented the FY2027 budget, which totals approximately $41.7 million and maintains a balanced budget with revenue and expenditure both increasing by just under 4%. Key revenue sources include real estate taxes ($25.7 million), other taxes ($5.6 million), and charges for services, while major expenditures are led by the Public Safety Department with over $14 million. Mr.

Covington highlighted new revenue sources including stop sign cameras generating around $695K and a proposed increase in the utility tax rate from 1.72% to 2.5%.

The Council discussed the budget, focusing on revenue assumptions and expenditure on drivers. Personnel costs accounted for 64-65% of the budget and increased by $2.1 million (7.7%) due to wage adjustments and a new four-year collective bargaining agreement for police officers. Mr. Salmerón addressed utility costs, noting that while the solar farm would provide some savings, rising electricity and fuel prices might lead to underestimated costs in 2027. He explained the proposed public utility tax, which would apply to a broad range of utility providers and aim to cover increasing operational costs, including streetlight upgrades. Councilmember Pope inquired about the stop sign camera revenues, estimated at $695,000, and requested clarification on where this money would be directed. Mr. Salmerón clarified that revenue from stop sign camera fines will be dedicated to public safety improvements, not pet projects as some had incorrectly assumed online. He also addressed the future of speed cameras, noting that while they currently generate around $700,000, this revenue is not sustainable long-term and will be used for one-time expenditures like police vehicles and equipment.

The Council discussed budget updates, focusing on non-departmental costs which decreased by about 24%, with the largest decrease in workers' compensation insurance. Mr. Salmeron addressed rising retirees' prescription costs, which have increased significantly from previous years, and discussed potentially revisiting the healthcare plan structure to include prescriptions, rather than maintaining a separate self-insured prescription plan. Mr. Covington noted a 20% decrease in funds transfers, leveraging existing fund balances, and Mr. Salmerón highlighted the final payment of a 2020 bond loan in FY2027, which will result in savings of over $300,000 in debt service.

Mr. Covington noted that the FY2027 budget is balanced without tax increases for the eighth consecutive year. Personnel costs are the main expense driver, and while revenue growth is modest, the budget relies on drawing $1.8 million from reserves, raising concerns about long-term sustainability. The Council reviewed Fund Balances, Mr. Salmerón noting $10.3 million in Unassigned Funds, which represent about 25% of the annual operating budget or approximately three months of operating cash. The Council and Mr. Covington explored potential revenue streams, including examining recreation and parks fees, negotiating healthcare costs, and considering legislative options for additional municipal revenues.

Councilmember McKinney inquired about strategies to generate additional revenue, focusing on leveraging municipal assets and optimizing economic development efforts. Mr. Salmerón identified opportunities to capture a larger share of income and sales taxes from the City's role as both a residential community and commercial center, as well as exploring revenue-generating potential from existing facilities like pavilions and parking. He emphasized the importance of balancing community events with revenue-generating activities, noting two major upcoming economic drivers: the Beltway Plaza redevelopment and transit-oriented development at the Greenbelt Metro Station. Mr. Salmerón discussed the search for an Economic Development Manager, with eight candidates identified for interviews, and acknowledged the need to reposition vacant commercial spaces rather than relying on traditional office development.

Mr. George discussed the potential for revenue generation from the armory property, which spans nine acres with 4.5 acres being developable. Councilmember Fritz explored modernizing revenue streams, suggesting the need to adapt funding methods beyond traditional sources like property taxes and cable taxes. Bill Orleans, a Greenbelt resident, inquired about the WMATA funding and tax abatements. It was noted by Mr. Covington that there are currently 17 large-scale abatements totaling over $2 million in potential costs, though the timing of these abatements remains uncertain. Mr. Salmerón added staff regularly review the status of appeals for tax year 2025 and 2026, noting that the state's process can take up to 18 months. The budget for property tax abatements in 2027 was set at $400,000, with actuals exceeding the 2026 budget of $200,000.

Judith Davis, Greenbelt East, inquired about a solar farm project. Mr. Salmerón clarified that while it is not an agrivoltaics system, there is a potential buyout clause in the contract for the City to purchase the system in the future. He noted that the solar farm's design is built on a gravel base for minimal maintenance, and plans for a future tour for the Council.

Mr. Salmerón addressed the Council’s concerns about membership and training expenses, clarifying that the budget allows Councilmembers, Police Department, Administration, and Public Works to attend conferences and seminars as needed. The Council also covered the Administration section, which includes City Clerk's office, Constituent Services, and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives, with no new initiatives being added to the budget noted by Mr. Salmerón.

Mr. Salmerón addressed the need for preparation work and educational campaigns regarding ranked choice voting and mail-in ballots for the upcoming election and adding additional funds in the Election account. The Council discussed budget proposals for various departments, including General Government, Finance, Human Resources, and Information Technology. Mr. Salmerón explored challenges in Public Information Office (PIO) and proposed hiring a part-time communication specialist to address multilingual communication and project-based marketing needs. Councilmember McKinney suggested leveraging HOAs and other existing communication channels to improve outreach efficiency.

Mr. Salmerón has been in discussions with the Constituent Service Coordinator and the Public Information Officer, to create a master list of residents and contact information to improve targeted messaging through existing communication channels. The Council reviewed legal expenses, including $40,000 spent on collective bargaining discussions, and decided to maintain the current legal budget for 2027 due to anticipated increased expenses from potential annexations and Public Works Collective Bargaining.

Mr. George proposed restructuring the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Officer position by removing it from Administration Department and integrating it into the Human Resource (HR) Department as an Employee Engagement Coordinator, which would better align with HR functions and allow for more cohesive employee support activities. Concerns raised by the Council about potentially minimizing the scope of the position if moved to HR.

Mr. George explained that the proposed change would allow for better focus by separating internal-facing employee engagement from broader DEI responsibilities across all City departments. Council members expressed varying views on the proposal, with some advocating for a more comprehensive approach that integrates DEI across all City functions and Michael Hartman, a Greenbelt resident, suggested having an advisory committee for disability and inclusion. The discussion highlighted the need for ongoing commitment to DEI work regardless of the specific role structure, with emphasis on ensuring the initiative permeates all City activities and departments.

The Council discussed the Agency Funds for pet assistance and spay/neuter services, with Councilmember Pope raised questions about fund restrictions and potential reallocation. Council addressed cemetery management, with Judith Davis, Greenbelt East, noting the need to reorganize budget allocations to properly account for all City cemeteries including historical and enslaved cemeteries.

Information Items:

Mr. Salmerón informed the Council that the Four Cities Meeting had to be rescheduled from Thursday, April 23rd to either Thursday, April 30th or Thursday, May 7th due to the Town of Berwyn Heights is having their Candidates Night on Thursday, April 23rd. Mayor Pro Tem Weaver suggested checking the Fire Chief’s availability and then revisiting the conversation at the Monday April 13th Regular Meeting.

There was discussion regarding which upcoming Budget Work Session Council would like to have in Greenbelt West. The Council decided to have the Public Safety Budget Work Session at the Springhill Lake Recreation Center.

The meeting ended at 10:17 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Shaniya Lashley-Mullen
Deputy City Clerk