

April 18, 2023

At the special meeting of the Board of Supervisors of Prince Edward County, held at the Court House, thereof, on Tuesday, the 18th day of April, 2023; at 7:00 p.m., there were present:

Pattie Cooper-Jones
J. David Emert
Llew W. Gilliam, Jr.
Victor "Bill" Jenkins
E. Harrison Jones
Odessa H. Pride
Jerry R. Townsend
Cannon Watson

Also present: Douglas P. Stanley, County Administrator; Cheryl Stimpson, Finance Director; and Crystal Baker, Finance Manager.

Chairman Gilliam called the special meeting to order.

Supervisor Jones offered the invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

In Re: Public Hearing – FY 2023-2024 Budget and Tax Rates

Chairman Gilliam announced that this was the date and time scheduled for a public hearing on the proposed 2023-2024 Budget and FY 2023 Tax Rate. Notice of this hearing was advertised according to law in the April 7, 2023 and April 14, 2023 editions of THE FARMVILLE HERALD, a newspaper published in the County of Prince Edward.

Mr. Stanley said following his presentation on the proposed 2023 Tax Levies and FY 2023-2024 Budget, a public hearing would be held on the budget. He said no motion could be made this evening because State law requires localities to wait seven days before the Board can take action; to that end, the Board will meet Tuesday, April 25 at 7:00 p.m. to consider the budget. He said the General Assembly has not yet come back [into session] to consider amendments to the [State] budget, and there are a few unknowns in their final budget; he said the Board has decided to move forward, and may have to hold another public hearing at a later date to amend the County budget.

Mr. Stanley said the Board and staff have been working on the budget since January; he said seven meetings and work sessions have been held specifically on the budget. Mr. Stanley presented final budget notes, as follows:

1. Budget includes an across the board 5.00% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for ALL employees and an additional 2.0% COLA if approved through the State budget for Compensation Board funded positions. In addition, 13 employees have been identified for a 1-4 step merit increase.
2. The proposed budget is balanced at a real estate rate of \$0.51 (\$0.04 increase for CIP) and personal property rate of \$4.50 (current rate).
3. We have included a revised 3.2% increase for the Health Insurance costs. This is a reduction from the original estimate of 5%.
4. Outside agency budgets have been included as recommended by the Board at the March 21st work session.
5. Prince Edward Sheriffs Office:
 - Overtime Increase from \$120,000 to \$175,800
 - Equipment Maintenance from \$85,000 to \$95,000
 - Vehicle Maintenance from \$54,000 to \$75,000
6. Fire and Rescue:
 - VFD contributions up
 - \$74,800 to \$80,000
 - Fuel from \$35,000 to \$40,000
 - Emergency Communications System Upgrade - \$100,000
7. IT Department-To FT (\$40,000+)
8. Planning - Professional Services (\$50,000) -for Comp Plan update
9. Reassessment Increase to go to 4-Year Cycle - (\$75,000 to \$150,000)
10. Legal Services -(\$50,000 to \$75,000)
11. Building Inspections -Funding for lease of new vehicle (\$5,000)
12. Regional Economic Development Initiative - (\$25,000)
13. School CIP Funding -(\$250,000 to \$425,000)
14. School CIP Funding (Meals Tax) - (\$200,000)
15. Solid Waste
 - Paving (\$45,000)
 - New scale house (\$26,000)
 - Equipment (\$20,000 + \$100,224 Debt payment for Loader)
16. CIP - (\$508,708)
17. Sandy River
 - Engineering (\$200,000)
 - Legal (\$17,500)
 - Debt Service (\$725,000)
18. Contingency Funding (\$121,094)

As noted above, the budget was balanced at a real estate (RE) tax rate of \$0.51 and a personal property (PP) rate of \$4.50 based on 100% of the 2023 NADA Clean Loan value assessment. The Board advertised an additional increase \$0.04 in the RE rate to continue to plan for the eventual debt service needed for the Sandy River (\$0.03) and Elementary School (\$0.01) projects.

As advertised, a tax rate cannot be increased unless it is readvertised and a new public hearing held. There is no such requirement if the Board would like to decrease that rate.

Mr. Stanley then reviewed the “Proposed 2023 Tax Levies and FY 2023-2024 Budget Public Hearing” presentation.

Chairman Gilliam opened the public hearing.

Dr. Peter Gur, Farmville District, expressed his support for the County budget and increase in the tax rate to support the schools. He added that he is concerned about school parking, and suggested an additional parking lot at the Elementary School to alleviate congestion. He stated the Sandy River project will benefit the County and would like to see the project extend from Crewe to Hampden-Sydney.

Eric Hodges, Lockett District, expressed his support for the four-cent increase [in the tax rate]. He said the improvements to the schools are necessary, and if approved, asked that a bigger portion of the increase go to the schools.

James E. Ghee, Buffalo District, commended Mr. Stanley on his presentation at the Prince Edward County NAACP meeting last month; he stated that when Mr. Stanley came to this community, Mr. Stanley asked to speak with branch members, and each meeting has been positive and a good step forward. Mr. Ghee stated his concerns regarding broadband, public education and the Sandy River Reservoir, all of which mean a brighter future for our community. He said all have of those concerns are being addressed, and is glad to see the progress made. He added that water is the new gold and those who control the water, control their own future. Mr. Ghee expressed his support for the proposed budget; he added that most of the NAACP membership is on a fixed income but still understand the need to support public education, and that we need to be great innovators with public education within our community and stand ready, willing and able to assist any way we can to make sure we have the best public education division. Mr. Ghee said the organization believes Prince Edward County is on the right track and supports the advertised budget.

Justin Pope, Farmville District, expressed his support of the proposed budget, stating that in doing so, it will show Richmond that the citizens are willing to do their part. He said it also signals to the parents that the community wants to be helpful in the schools; he said test scores are up and two Prince Edward County High School graduates were named Goldwater Scholars, one at Longwood [University] and one at University of Mary Washington. He said it sends a signal to current and future teachers, and to students who will see what is important and what adults value. Mr. Pope said it will send a signal to businesses and families considering locating here as the school system is the most important economic development tool that can be invested in, and is a signal that the community cares about education. It will send a signal to all citizens that the schools are a County’s collective responsibility. He stated Mr. Stanley has done a tremendous job to move the County forward.

Kenneth Fortino, Farmville District, expressed his support of the proposed budget, and stated that as an educator, values public education. He said that to see the schools are struggling and there are challenges, it is important to support the public schools because the struggle harms the students and the financial, social and civic lives of all those in the County. He stated Prince Edward County has one of the lowest real estate tax rates in the Commonwealth, and in maintaining that distinction, while the schools lack the resources that they need, is inappropriate. He thanked the Board for considering correcting that imbalance and moving in the direction where the resources are available. He said supporting the education of the children of this County is the responsibility of the County residents and it is appropriate [for the Board] to ask the citizens of the County to do their part and supply the resources that the School needs. He said if we fulfill this responsibility, it will benefit the County financially and civically far into the future. He encouraged the Board to approve this proposed budget.

Chapman Hood Frazier, Lockett District, expressed his support for the proposed budget. He said he works with students and said the proposed increase is long overdue. He said he sees how hard the teachers are working and he is seeing positive things happen at the schools.

There being no one further wishing to speak, Chairman Gilliam closed the public hearing.

Supervisor Watson asked that those looking at the three cents vs one cent [towards the projects] understand that it does not correlate that much with the project spending. He said this is an internal funding mechanism and is not representative of how much money is being spent on each project.

Supervisor Pride thanked everyone who came to support; she said taxes have not been increased in a while, and in order to see growth, we have to raise taxes at some point.

Chairman Gilliam thanked all for coming to the public hearing. He said there is a lot to consider with the things that are going on in the County; he said the Board tries to make sure we do a good job. He said if the citizens don't think the Board is [doing a good job], he wants to hear about it.

Supervisor Townsend made a motion, seconded by Supervisor Cooper-Jones, to prepare a resolution to honor James C. Moore, past Board of Supervisors member, on his passing; the motion carried unanimously:

Aye:	Pattie Cooper-Jones	Nay:	None
	J. David Emert		
	Llew W. Gilliam, Jr.		
	Victor "Bill" Jenkins		
	E. Harrison Jones		
	Odessa H. Pride		
	Jerry R. Townsend		
	Cannon Watson		

On motion of Supervisor Cooper-Jones, seconded by Supervisor Townsend, and adopted by the following vote

Aye:	Pattie Cooper-Jones	Nay:	None
	J. David Emert		
	Llew W. Gilliam, Jr.		
	Victor "Bill" Jenkins		
	E. Harrison Jones		
	Odessa H. Pride		
	Jerry R. Townsend		
	Cannon Watson		

the meeting was recessed at 7:42 p.m. until Tuesday, April 25, 2023 at 7:00 p.m.