

REMARKS - "THE PEOPLE'S BUDGET"  
FISCAL YEAR 2022 BUDGET RECONCILIATION AND ADOPTION  
THE HONORABLE CALVIN S. HAWKINS, II  
CHAIR, PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY COUNCIL  
THURSDAY, MAY 27, 2021 (*as prepared for delivery*)

Prince George's County - my colleagues and I on the County Council are pleased to report that we have achieved the unanimous adoption of a new and balanced \$4.6 billion FY22 Operating Budget – that's 2.2% over last year's spending plan.

This new budget will guide our County's recovery from the devastating, historic and unprecedented impacts of the coronavirus global pandemic.

The deadly virus is not over yet, but today, after two months of virtual Committee of the Whole budget sessions and staff reviews, Prince George's County is now on reopening journey.

Scoring another Triple-A Bond Rating, our financial decisions are proving right for the moment and for the future. County residents can take pride that Wall Street shares in the promise of our County and our fiscal leadership.

We can all now start to look forward with optimism, however cautious, to a future that emphasizes our shared priorities, and strengthens our residents, businesses and communities.

COVID-19 paused everything for a time, and regrettably, there is still pain from our unspeakable loss, but our residents, businesses and communities are amazingly strong and resilient. And we stand united in an unparalleled effort to inform, protect, feed, teach, support, comfort, test and now vaccinate one another.

These are times like none other – not only for the challenges, but also for the opportunities before us.

This final budget package is built upon sound and responsible principles of fiscal management, which we continue to follow. It will take time for our slow economy to heal, but Prince George's County is not standing still, and we will not be pulled back.

Let me pause for a moment to recognize my hardworking, determined and passionate Council colleagues. Thank you, Madam Vice-Chair Deni Taveras, and Council Members Tom Dernoga, Dannielle Glaros, Todd Turner, Jolene Ivey, Derrick Leon Davis, Rodney Streeter, Monique Anderson-Walker, Sydney Harrison and Mel Franklin. Each Council Member is a tremendous asset to this County, and certainly to the budget process.

Reviewing and adopting the budget is among the most important duties of the Legislative Branch. After receiving the proposed FY 22 spending plan from County Executive Angela Alsobrooks in March, we prioritized the Council's fiscal responsibility, especially considering the evolving economic conditions brought on by the pandemic.

This budget presents strong evidence of our ability to work well together. We have been driven in this effort by a shared purpose and common priorities - the post-pandemic recovery, police reform, economic development, jobs, strengthening our social services safety net, education, and infrastructure.

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A special note of gratitude to my co-leader Vice-Chair Taveras for skillfully presiding over our Committee of the Whole budget work sessions. Exercising our oversight responsibilities over the entire budget, I congratulate this entire body on our collective achievement.

This is the second year, following COVID safety protocols, that we have conducted our budget process virtually, and we are deeply grateful to everyone who participated, particularly our remarkable residents, who engaged with us during the budget town hall and public hearings. This work cannot happen without you.

The Council thanks every partner for their leadership and committed service to our residents, and their partnership with us. This is truly a much lighter lift together.

County Executive Angela Alsobrooks is a true "People's Champion" for Prince George's County. This Council appreciates her solid, decisive leadership. Our sincere gratitude is also extended to the Alsobrooks budget team, led by Chief Administrative Officer Tara Jackson and Budget Director Stanley Earley, and the entire Executive Branch, especially Deputy Chief Administrative Officer for Health, Human Services and Education Dr. George Askew, Health Officer Dr. Ernest Carter and now Director of Homeland Security Ronnie Gill, for your leadership and guidance through this public health emergency. Our very special gratitude is extended to Planning Board Chair Elizabeth Hewlett and her Park and Planning team, as well.

We look forward to continuing this work together as we brace our economic foundation, stabilize operations and position the County for a strong, sustained recovery.

To every County employee, especially those on the Legislative Team, thank you for your commitment of time and talent to the public good. We know it's more than a job for you – this is a mission, especially through these unprecedented times. Please know how much this Council appreciates your excellent, selfless service and your support in our assistance to residents. Thank you!

We are grateful for the strong support of state lawmakers this year, particularly on such critical projects and efforts as the Purple Line, and the County-Wide Map Amendment, which will further spur economic development. We look forward to their continued leadership to ensure much-needed State resources in support of the County's recovery journey. I want to also acknowledge the critical support of our federal delegation as well, as they continue to work with the Biden Administration to bring every resource to bear for Americans, including Prince Georgians, to supercharge our recovery.

The Biden Administration's \$350 Billion American Rescue Plan Act, including "Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds," is expected to go a very long way to mitigate the fiscal impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Council and the County Executive will consult on how to best deploy these resources, with the anticipation that these monies will be an important lifeline strengthening the County's health and human services safety net.

Our budget negotiations were marked by a spirit of congeniality, a true commitment to collaboration, and a few important Council-initiated budget investments to note.

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Whether virtual, hybrid or in-person learning, this has been a challenging year for our school community. The cornerstone of economic development and prosperity, our budget continues to invest the lion's share of County revenues in education. The Council concurs with the County Executive's \$2.34 billion for the Prince George's County School System, to reimagine education and improve our digital connection.

This week marks the one-year anniversary of the brutal murder of George Floyd by police sworn to protect. His killing sparked protests calling for an end to systemic injustices in the criminal justice system and police reform. Prince George's County responded by hiring a new police chief and beginning the implementation of County Police Reform Work Group recommendations. This Council, committed to continue working together to bring about societal change, added FY22 funding to support a partnership between the Health and Police departments to improve Mobile Crisis Intervention initiatives, including the addition of mental health crisis workers to 911 and increasing mental health crisis teams. Additional funding will support recruiting more officers from our communities, and to ensure adequate staffing.

The pandemic exposed and worsened health disparities and inequities; overwhelmed social services; and shifted the basic needs of our residents for food, housing and jobs. With a focus on our most vulnerable, the Council is increasing funding for Federally Qualified Health Centers; supporting the hiring of a consultant for a 10-year Homeless Plan update; increasing funding for the County's Youth Services bureaus; supporting a Fair Housing Program to address unfair, wrongful evictions; and increasing support for the County's Developmental Disabilities Administration, to reduce the devastating impact of COVID on operations, staff, and clients.

We recognize that there are residents, communities and businesses that have been more vulnerable to the pandemic's impact and doubly impacted by Purple Line construction. The Council has ensured this budget provides funding for housing rehabilitation along the Purple Line Corridor; funding to the Economic Development Corporation to support Purple Line Corridor businesses, including Latino entrepreneurs affected by the construction and the pandemic. There are also monies to develop and deploy the Prince George's Supply Schedule in the County's Office of Central Services, providing opportunities for County-based businesses.

Finding gainful employment is a hurdle for ex-offenders, and the inability to find work can lead to recidivism. We are working to put in place programs that support formerly incarcerated persons and help them become productive members of our community. The Council has ensured FY 22 funding support for workforce development courses, and the implementation of the Second Chance Act of 2021, administered by Employ Prince George's, to encourage employers to hire County residents returning from incarceration with a financial incentive.

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***Additional Council investments include:***

- Funding for a Countywide Flood Assessment by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- Doubling the County's funding for County road repaving
- Implementation of the County Climate Action Plan
- Expansion of TheBus Saturday routes and funding for study of TheBus expansion into South County
- Tree Trimming in County communities
- Additional staff and inspectors in Dept. of Permits, Inspections and Enforcement, for Green-building Provisions in County's new Zoning Ordinance
- Additional funding for County beautification efforts including signage, bus shelters, bike racks, and trash can placement

In closing, it has been my great privilege to present "The People's Budget," for FY 22.

I hope you will have the opportunity to examine the new budget for yourself and review the investments we've made to move our County from strength to strength.... from pandemic to recovery to prosperity.

As a person of faith, I recall the words of Jeremiah 17:8

*They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought. Their leaves stay green, and they never stop producing fruit.*

God bless you and God bless Prince George's County.