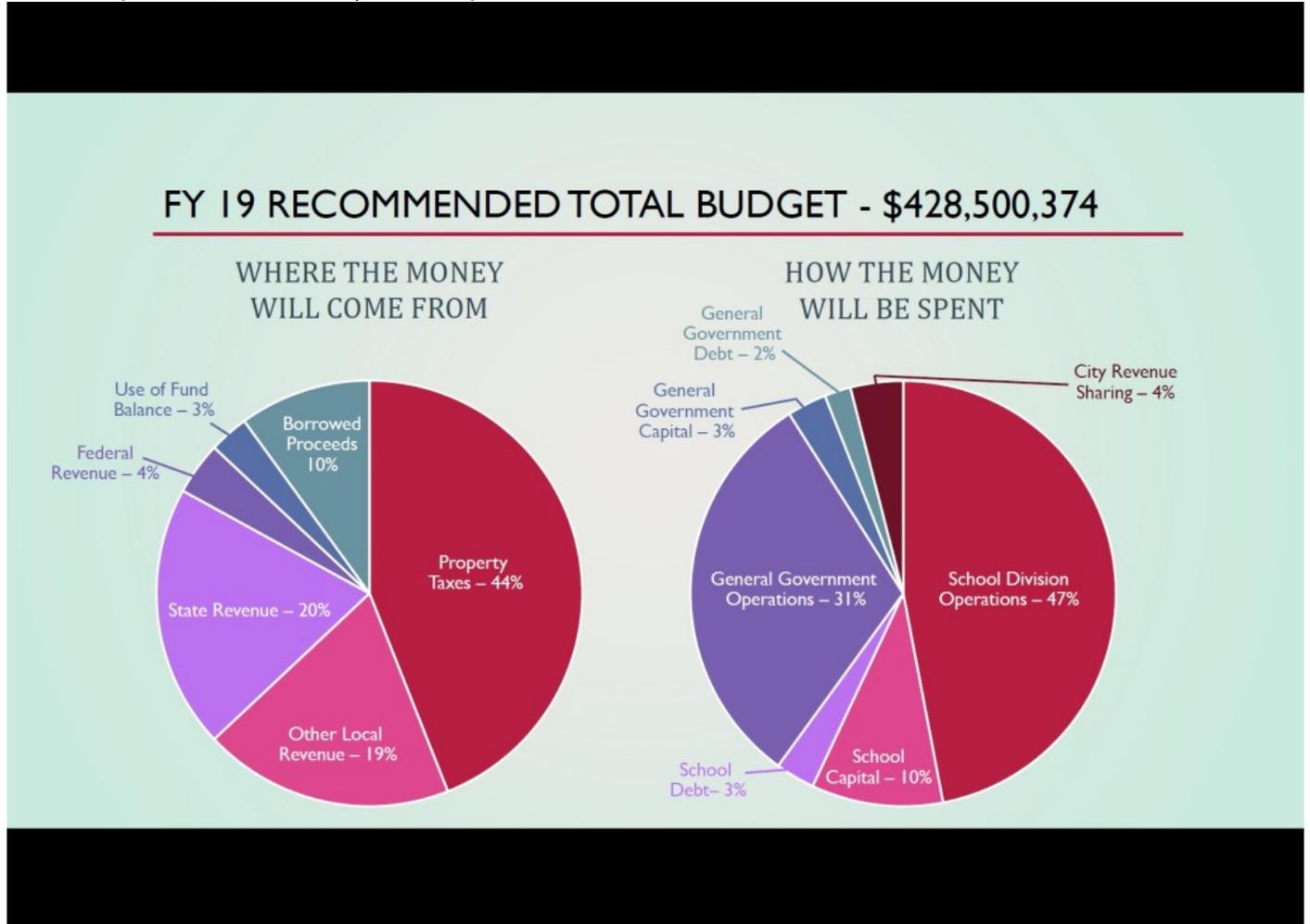


Albemarle executive proposes \$428.5 million budget for FY2019
written by Newspack Team | February 16, 2018



The new Albemarle County Executive has presented the Board of Supervisors with a \$428.5 million operating and capital budget for fiscal year 2019. That is a 7.7 percent increase over the budget for the current year.

“For the second year in a row, we will not recommend a tax rate increase but we have an ambitious budget where we are moving the needle in a number of ways,” said Jeffrey Richardson, who has been in the position since late October.

Richardson’s plan is to continue the property tax rate of 83.9 cents per \$100 of assessed value. He briefed members of the media on his recommended budget on Thursday.

The tagline for this year’s document is ‘delivering tangible results in an evolving landscape.’

“Fiscal year ‘19 is a bridge year to fiscal year ‘20,” Richardson said. “We’ll be talking in tandem with [supervisors] on not just what’s in this budget coming in July but also how their decisions will affect some of the things we’ll be talking about twelve months from now.”

In all there are 29.5 additional positions in the budget.

“In fiscal year ‘09, we had 6.8 percent positions per 1,000 populations,” Richardson said.

“Recommended in this coming year’s budget, fiscal year ‘19, we are back at that level of 6.8 percent. What occurred over that ten-year period that we all lived through was a significant national recession.”

During that period, many positions were frozen to reduce spending. But now the national economy has rebounded and the county has slowly been adding new positions.

“We’ve got new positions that will be in the budget for next year where we have gone through in a pretty pain-staking way to look at where we need capacity,” Richardson said. “Where do we have pinch-points? Where do we expect to do more next year?”

That will include adding new rescue personnel in the southern half of the county. That will also include two new police officers.

Over that time, an additional 15,000 people moved to Albemarle. The Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service at the University of Virginia estimates the 2017 population at 107,697.

“We’ve had to redesign processes and we’ve had to become smarter, quicker and faster over that ten-year period,” Richardson said.

The recommended budget includes a two percent salary increase for all county employees.

The budget reflects the wishes of some supervisors to invest in the urban areas. There’s an additional \$227,028 to be spent on small-area plans and other transportation initiatives. Another \$178,760 will go toward mowing medians, landscaping and street sweeping. The Jefferson-Madison Regional Library will get an additional \$13,521 to add two hours per week to the Northside Library’s operating hours.

“Increased urban density typically goes hand in hand with an expectation of a higher level of services,” Richardson said.

The budget also includes the transfer of an additional \$7.7 million in unused funds to capital programs. An additional \$444,077 will be transferred to capital from the FY19 operating fund.

“This recommended capital improvement plan for FY19 through FY23 is greatly expanded,” reads Richardson’s executive summary. “It includes a potential bond referendum that would obtain citizens input on a number of school division and other quality-of-life capital projects.”

Full details will become known as the budget is released in full online.

Supervisors face a series of decisions in the next year such as what to do about the former B.F. Yancey Elementary School in Esmont. The school board closed the facility in 2017 and transferred ownership to the county.

“The budget includes funding to keep the operational facility at a minimum level recognizing there is pending board discussion to ultimately shape what that future use is,” said senior budget analyst Andy Bowman.

In January, the county has also entered into a lease with the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation for the future Biscuit Run Park. The budget does not contain a specific amount to help transition Biscuit Run from a unfunded state park to a local park, according to Bowman.

So far there are no details about how the process of opening the park will proceed.

At the same time, the county's parks and recreation department is conducting a needs assessment for the entire system. That work will not be completed until after the budget is adopted in April.

"It's a little behind our budget process in terms of planning for the future," Richardson said, but said that would be a topic during the budget development of the fiscal year 2020 budget.

There's also funding for a climate action plan. In 2017, the Board reestablished climate change as a priority following a deemphasis in the early 2010's. The budget includes a position devoted to implementing the plan.

"I think that's a big step with us recruiting and bringing someone on board with the technical experience to help guide that process as we move forward," Richardson said.

The county will continue to make additional investments in the Bright Stars program including \$201,105 for a classroom at Woodbrook Elementary School and \$42,500 for the United Way Childcare Scholarship Program.

Supervisors will hold a public hearing on Richardson's recommended budget Tuesday, Feb. 20 beginning at 6:00 p.m. A series of work sessions will begin on Thursday Feb. 22 at 3:00 p.m. in Room 241 at the main county office building on McIntire Road.

Additional work sessions are scheduled for Feb. 26, March 1 and March 5.