

Council held their first work session on the budget on March 7, 2018.

Tonight Council will consider increasing the lodging tax to add more revenue to the budget.

This year's budget projects that revenue from cigarette taxes will be down \$75,000 next year.

The budget assumed the city would collect \$800,000 in the current fiscal year from the tax, but that figure has now been revised to \$715,000 for the year. Budget officials are only projecting the city will

take in \$725,000 from the cigarette tax next year.

"A decline in the cigarette tax is actually kind of a good sign from a public health standpoint," said City Councilor Kathy Galvin.

One of the city's two assistant city managers said smokers could just be buying from the county.

"The county doesn't have a tax," said Leslie Beauregard.

In Virginia, all counties do not have the enabling authority to levy such a tax. Legislation to allow those localities to hold a referendum on creating one failed to clear the General Assembly this year.

"When the Council raised that a few years ago it really wasn't about trying to get a lot more revenue," Jones said. "It was really focused on how you not encourage folks to smoke."

The recommended budget includes \$ million in "miscellaneous revenue." This includes \$515,000 in earned interest, \$175,000 in rent payments, and \$60,000 from revenue from the city-county owned Levy Opera House in Court Square.

Additional revenue comes from money not spent in previous years, including \$114,000 for two years of an unfunded arts coordination position and \$100,000 not spent on an assistant city manager's salary. That position had been budgeted in the current fiscal year as a neighborhood planner but has since been elevated.

The city will also receive a reimbursement of \$568,259 from the Blue Ridge Regional Jail for debt service that is no longer required.

The city will get additional revenue from Washington Park by beginning to rent the indoor recreational center separately from the outdoor shelter.

"We've never treated it that way before," Beauregard said. "There's a really high demand for that type of space so that would generate approximately \$15,000."

The fee to use the indoor space will be \$250 and the shelter will be \$80.

The budget anticipates \$15,000 from this source.

Another \$150,000 will be spent on renovating the basketball courts at Washington Park.

The operating budget anticipates hiring two full-time employees to staff the new skate park in McIntire Park. The \$2 million facility is currently under construction and expected to open this fall. No user fees will be charged.

"Is [a user fee] something to consider?" Galvin asked. "Because I'm seeing all those other facilities that have a fee...That's a very expensive facility that we're building."

Parks and Recreation Director Brian Daly said there are no plans to do so. Galvin said she would be interested in levying one. Daly said that would add to the cost of the facility.

"There will need to be some additional design and construction work done temporarily in order to create access points to control entrance if we're going to charge a fee," Daly said. However, he said the department does anticipate revenue from instruction, classes and competitions.

The budget also anticipates converting a part-time position in the Office of Human Rights to full-time at a cost of \$38,000.

"It was full-time and then we brought it back to part-time realizing that it probably needed to be full-time again because there's a lot of work that that office is doing," Beauregard said.

Mayor Nikuyah Walker said she wanted to have a report on the Office of Human Rights before committing to converting the position to full-time.

Some in the community have called for an assistant city attorney position be created inside of the office to work on investigations of discrimination.

"Some members of the public have been requesting that the position be much more focused on enforcement and investigative work and prosecution," Galvin said.

Jones said when the office was initially created, the manager was to have played a greater role in investigations.

"We did not have very many investigations come in the first couple of years so we took a step to downgrade the second position," Jones said. "Both can conduct investigations but they're doing other work like the Dialogue on Race."

The first person to hold the manager position, Zan Tewksbury, was a civil rights attorney. She left the position in May 2015.

Currently the Office of Human Rights is only authorized to investigate discrimination at Charlottesville companies with fewer than 15 employees.

"In order to change that dynamic and get more investigations and to justify hiring an investigator, you'd really have to up that number," Jones said.

Complaints about larger firms are directed to the Richmond office of the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Charlene Green, the current manager of the office, said work includes trainings, workshops and helping put on programs such as the recent screening of the film "I'm Not Racist, Am I?"

"The community outreach right now is a big piece of what happens," Green said. "The work of the Human Rights Commission involves the subcommittees that are focused on the protected classes and protected activities that we have."

Green said all of these subcommittees weigh in on city policy in order to make recommendations to Council. She said some reports will make it to elected officials this year.

“All of that is being done right by one and a half staff,” Green said.

Green said several people call or email the office each day with concerns or complaints. She said the full-time outreach coordinator would be able to assist with investigations under the current policy.

Jones said the Office of Human Rights is currently scheduled to give a report to Council at the April 21 meeting.

“It makes sense for us to have a discussion about this,” Jones said. “The question for us is, can we have that discussion in-depth before the budget is passed?”

Councilor Wes Bellamy was not present at the meeting.