

**Village of Friendship Heights
May 11, 2026 Meeting Transcript**

[00:00:02.23] - Speaker 1

Village Council meeting. Um, it is 6:33. All council members are here, and if you wouldn't mind starting with Council Member Muller, if you could identify yourself for— to make it easy for the transcription. Whoops, I don't think you're— are you on?

[00:00:23.29] - Speaker 2

Al Muller.

[00:00:25.24] - Speaker 3

John Conlow.

[00:00:26.28] - Speaker 4

Francine Klein.

[00:00:29.12] - Speaker 3

Roy Schaefer.

[00:00:30.16] - Speaker 1

Martha Sout.

[00:00:31.25] - Speaker 2

Vic Basil.

[00:00:32.23] - Speaker 3

Allison Ault.

[00:00:35.16] - Speaker 1

Great. So the first thing on our agenda is an update on Page Park and the Red House from our project manager, Jim Wilson. And there's a lot going on, as I understand. Please come to the

microphone and— I guess maybe you'll first do the Page Park and allow questions and then do Red House and allow questions. Okay, thank you.

[00:01:02.22] - Speaker 5

Good evening, everybody. Let's see, the Page Park, a couple breaking down in a couple sections, permits and construction, and there's also a couple design things just to— for you to be aware of. The permit issuance currently is pending receipt of the revised easements. We had sent the easement documents in, the county made some revisions to them, so we have to, uh, re-sign them and resend them in. And after the receipt of that, uh, those documents, there's approximately 4 weeks before we would get our permits.

[00:01:38.14] - Speaker 1

It sounds like that's the stormwater—

[00:01:40.05] - Speaker 5

that's the stormwater, right? That's the ability for us to start working.

[00:01:43.04] - Speaker 1

Okay.

[00:01:45.11] - Speaker 5

The total duration of construction is about 2 months. So if we receive our permits in, say, mid-June, that'll bring us into the second, third week or so, the latter part of August for completion. We're also continuing to make efforts to— I always, when I say this, I always want to, like, say I'm really going to say this out loud— to figure out how to not do the pergola. There's a permit that was submitted, so we had to apply for a demo permit that we had to do. Now we have to close out the other permit. We just want to do very carefully, but we are pursuing that and should have that done shortly. The design issues on Page Park, so that everybody's aware, there is a tree in the northeast corner of the park, and it's a I'm not an arborist or whatever, but it looks like it's a nice tree, but it is— the root zones are being impacted by the required bioretention structures, and the bioretention cannot be moved or relocated enough to not impact the tree. The Montgomery County and the civil engineer, as well as we had our own arborist look at the tree, And they say it was okay to take it out.

[00:03:08.08] - Speaker 5

They don't think it will survive. But the Parks and Grounds Committee on Friday unanimously voted to try to see what we could do to try to save this tree. So during the process of the construction, we're going to get the arborist involved, just make sure we're doing everything we can possibly can to allow for that tree to survive. Another point, we are reaching out to the playground manufacturers who are interested in, in the project some time ago. We're reaching out to them with the drawings and saying, here is the space that's available for playground, for children's equipment, and ask them to make the recommendations. There were several pieces of equipment that were identified in the past, but they weren't necessarily located exactly and situated with our specific situation. So we're sending them the drawings. Actually, Julian sent them the drawings, and they're starting to get feedback too, is what can we do in that space that we have. Uh, lastly, we, um, we had conversations about putting a, uh, a fencing on the top of the wall, the back, what would be the wall most closest to the sidewalk where the pergola previously existed. The, um, in looking at the situation, the, the height of the fence that's above the wall, that it was the top of that fence was going to be between 8 and 9 feet above the sidewalk.

[00:04:41.12] - Speaker 5

You're a distance away, but it's 8 or 9 feet, just to give you a visual. And the, um, the conclusion was, is that as the fencing is not required to meet code that in the parks and grounds that we agreed to, it was agreed that we would not be putting the fencing up now. You can do it at a later date if you so chose. You could put a railing or you could put the fence up, but because it's not required by code and having something that's, you know, 8-plus feet in the air as you're walking down the sidewalk, it'll look like a fence across there and not terribly inviting.

[00:05:18.16] - Speaker 1

If I could just ask you to pause for a second. We originally thought we would be voting on not having the fence, but it turns out— and I'm trying to be very procedurally proper here— we didn't officially vote on having the fence, so we don't need to have a vote to not have the fence. We had discussions where we thought we would, so there's not going to be a fence and we don't have to vote on it. But I would also like to add a little clarification on— I saw the drawings of the fence, and I would say it looked closer to a prison than a fence. So yeah, that, you know, if you get up there, you're not getting out.

[00:06:01.28] - Speaker 2

So, Madam Chair, I just point out that I think that's a much more logical decision than the county, who did not approve the pergola but decided that we definitely needed a permit to take it down.

[00:06:15.17] - Speaker 1

Yeah, yeah, I, I understand, I understand. So I just wanted to explain, no fence No vote, and our project manager has explained the rationale. So thanks. So continue on.

[00:06:27.15] - Speaker 5

So that is— that's where we stand currently on Page Park. And, and the— as far as the Red House is concerned, there was a—

[00:06:34.25] - Speaker 4

can I—

[00:06:35.06] - Speaker 5

yes, ma'am.

[00:06:35.16] - Speaker 4

Do we want to have questions?

[00:06:37.08] - Speaker 5

I'm sorry.

[00:06:37.26] - Speaker 4

That's okay.

[00:06:39.07] - Speaker 1

Go right ahead.

[00:06:41.12] - Speaker 4

Uh, first, what is the easement for? What does that mean?

[00:06:46.01] - Speaker 5

Well, easement Whenever you have environmental devices, and that's why I'm calling these bioretention, basically they're places that capture water and allow the water to drain through the ground itself and not running off into the street. So whenever you have these devices or structures, even though it's not really a structure, it's a, the county, everywhere in the county you are required to put these devices or these structures in an easement, because if the, if the tenants or the operators, the owners do not take care of them, the county has the right to come in and do whatever maintenance may be required. So we have to put them in an easement.

[00:07:28.16] - Speaker 4

Thank you, that explains that. Another question: I was unaware that we were going to seek to put any playground equipment on the site. I I welcome that idea, but I know that, um, the neighbors who look down on the park, uh, the last time we had this discussion years ago, they were opposed to anything that was like bright neon colors, which, uh, playground equipment typically is, and they had suggested things that were more natural, uh, play equipment made of wood. So I— my guess is that the view of the neighbors has not changed in that regard, and I would keep that in mind. Also, the best piece of play equipment that I've ever seen is very close to us. I'm not saying it will do for us, but it's at the Westbard playground along River Road, where EYA is building a series of buildings now. And it is a combination of various ways to get up to a slide, and the beauty of it is that it actually encourages group play while you're getting up to the top of the slide, which no other slide I've ever seen does that, 'cause there's only one stair up and one way down, and so You have to take your turn and wait.

[00:09:02.16] - Speaker 4

That's not what this does. If just for your own education, if nothing else, if you would pass by and take a look at that and see how big it is compared to the space that we have, because that, that is the central piece at that playground that children play with.

[00:09:20.11] - Speaker 5

Yes, I will. I think I know where you're talking about. I've gone past there. And your play area is very small and it's surrounded by a stone edge, which is probably going to preclude anything from getting up just because you— the, the— they're so heavily governed, legal safety rules and regulations around play areas.

[00:09:44.04] - Speaker 4

Do we still have the, the space then that's considerably lower than the surrounding space?

[00:09:49.29] - Speaker 5

It was— we, in this revision, or in this updating of the designs, that area was raised up to be at the level of the patio that's kind of, if I'm calling it a patio, the stone top area, because we were going to have to put another ramp to go down into it to be accessible. So you either put a ramp and lose probably 15, 20% of it, or you raise it up.

[00:10:17.12] - Speaker 4

Yes, that's what I had recalled.

[00:10:19.09] - Speaker 5

It's pretty small, so you can have something—

[00:10:21.07] - Speaker 4

I still would like you to look at that Because they may have a smaller version of that that would work.

[00:10:26.29] - Speaker 5

If nothing else, find out who did it.

[00:10:28.27] - Speaker 4

That's fine. And I don't think we're ready to vote on anything unless we get community input.

[00:10:35.16] - Speaker 3

Right.

[00:10:36.12] - Speaker 4

Thank you.

[00:10:37.17] - Speaker 2

Madam Chair, just responding to my colleague, the intent was that this be for very little children, like 2 or 3-year-olds. There are a number of things that were sort of screened, and it was felt

that no more than 2, possibly 3 of these things might fit in there. So it'll be interesting what happens. And they were all, as Councilwoman Klein suggested, they were all either wood or painted a dark color. So that's consistent with what the community wanted.

[00:11:16.14] - Speaker 5

That's true. I did see them, and that's true.

[00:11:19.29] - Speaker 1

Other questions or comments on Page Park? Do you folks have any questions? Okay. I'm sorry, go ahead.

[00:11:30.15] - Speaker 3

So you mentioned you think everything's done by August, and then to get everything approved and checked off, is it weeks more?

[00:11:40.06] - Speaker 5

No, um, Well, it's August, you know, and it's kind of weather, obviously, if we have, you know, please do understand it's a date that is impacted by weather. The contractor had 40 workdays. So that's 2 months of construction.

[00:11:56.23] - Speaker 2

I mean—

[00:11:57.05] - Speaker 5

So as far as then getting everything signed off, that will be relatively quickly. You will probably have acts. There are bonds, I believe there were bonds that were posted, right, that were issued. So there's— you, you, you will get access to use the park before you will get all the bonds released from the county.

[00:12:14.27] - Speaker 3

Oh, okay.

[00:12:15.17] - Speaker 5

So it'll be quick. It will. It's not a long process to be able to occupy it.

[00:12:19.17] - Speaker 4

Okay.

[00:12:20.04] - Speaker 3

Thank you.

[00:12:21.29] - Speaker 2

Thank you.

[00:12:23.27] - Speaker 1

Um, I think we're ready for the Red House. Thanks.

[00:12:27.01] - Speaker 5

Yeah, the Red House. Um, there was a, um, in— as a contractor was trying to get his final inspections, uh, some requirements of some of the existing railings that were there had to get modified, and those have been installed, and the contractor has scheduled final inspections for tomorrow. And once they do that, we will be done with our inspections. We are still kind of— we're going to have to plan the timing, and we're going to put a small railing around, or guardrail, around the edge of the parking lot. But that's not a— it was not a permit issue or a code issue or anything. So, uh, just there was a little bit steeper edge to the asphalt and rather not get a car snagged on it. That's all we have.

[00:13:16.19] - Speaker 1

So, um, assume it passes inspection, are we then sort of passing over to the— do we call it the, the lease or the tenant? There we go, the tenant, to do the internal things they wanted to do.

[00:13:31.07] - Speaker 5

Yeah, he is in permit. His, his documents are in for permit. I do not have an update of it, of when, you know, kind of any of his timing type of things. Of course, I know he's going to be anxious because he's going to start paying rent and not have any income, so he's going to want to scoot along fairly quickly. So, okay.

[00:13:51.12] - Speaker 1

Um, Councilmember Mueller, thank you.

[00:13:55.10] - Speaker 2

Yes, I, I mentioned to the manager a month or so ago that we really do have to bring the present council up to date with what was negotiated—I don't remember how many years ago—with the Estrada family on what the plaque would look like. You may recall, or not, the purchase of the property was not only to decide how much the council would pay, but also would agree to give appropriate recognition of Miss Estrada, who rescued the house from complete deterioration. And the inscription of a historic plaque for the historic house was discussed, and the trail of emails I did find and gave to the manager so that can be shared. With counsel, um, out of the blue. Um, I've not spoken with Mr. Estrada. Dan and his sister were the ones that negotiated the sales until, I guess, just a few days ago, out of the blue, he emailed me and wanted to know what was happening with the house. He must be following what we're doing from a distance, um, because I don't think there's been any update, certainly not from me, and I don't think from the manager. In any case, I, I told him that, uh, um, we, we would be looking at, um, the, the final wording for the plaque and would let him know as soon as the council had decided on that.

[00:15:34.01] - Speaker 2

But if the manager would share that, um, I, I would appreciate it. Uh, the place that the plaque would be done is probably the place that we get all of our plaques, but The wording does need to be looked at. I hope it won't be changed greatly only because I don't know what the reaction of the Estrada family is. It took 2 or 3 back and forths. The mayor at that time, Melanie Rose-White, and myself worked on that. But you will see what it looks like and much of it was at the direction and the approval of the Estrada family.

[00:16:19.10] - Speaker 1

Um, Councilmember Muller, are you suggesting the precise language has already been approved?

[00:16:25.15] - Speaker 2

Oh, the, the language has not been approved. It was looked at, and Mayor White felt that even the color of the plaque had to be decided by the council. And since at that time I don't think the color of the welcoming sign to Friendship Heights had been decided on. I think now there

probably would be agreement, but it's up to the council, that the color would be compatible with the blues on all the other signs, but that was not decided. Neither the wording nor the exact placement. Obviously, it has to be somewhere near the house.

[00:17:07.20] - Speaker 1

Okay, would you like to propose something being the historian? Or would you— would you like to propose something being the historian or would you rather have the—

[00:17:18.05] - Speaker 2

Well, I would simply support what was discussed before but—

[00:17:25.17] - Speaker 1

Okay, so you'd rather—

[00:17:26.27] - Speaker 2

I would rather everyone look at it and hopefully not completely rewrite it, not that that— that would bother me, but I honestly don't know the reaction of Mr. Estrada.

[00:17:38.24] - Speaker 1

Okay, thank you. Any other— there we go.

[00:17:42.07] - Speaker 6

Um, Mr. Mansfield, just one other quick point on, uh, Red House. As we still have on our to-do list is the repainting of the house and the repair of the front porch, which is going to be a separate RFP that Jim and I are going to be working on. It does not relate to the inspections and the timing of the permits and everything else, but it is still to be done.

[00:18:04.12] - Speaker 1

Thank you. Any other questions or comments? Thank you. Thank you very much, Jim. You've been very helpful on all these, all these things. The next item is Chair's Announcements, and all the important things have already been shared or will be shared by other council members here and possibly our manager. So I don't want to double, uh, take too much time here, so I think we should move on to the general comments from the public. And we're waiting to see if we have anything. No comments. Okay, that means the next item is the village manager's Report.

[00:18:58.09] - Speaker 6

Oh, a couple quick items. One is the ballot drop box has been delivered to the front of the Village Center for the general— the primary election, which is June 23rd. So people who want to vote by mail or absentee ballot can drop it off in that box, and the county comes and picks it up all the way up to June 23rd. And we do have a security camera on the box, which we're required to have. That we just had installed specifically for that box. But once the box is removed, we'll still have the camera in place for the front of the building. Also, we did our annual sidewalk inspection and completion of the removal of the trip hazards, which just was completed last week. And, but we do have some areas of sidewalk that need to be replaced completely, so we're going to have a separate job for that. And we are soliciting some bids from contractors. We want to get that work done as soon as we can. Thank you.

[00:20:00.03] - Speaker 1

I have a question about the voting box. Sometimes there's a, like, a lock on it, and sometimes there's no lock. So if it's— does it get locked overnight, or— yes, can you explain that?

[00:20:14.29] - Speaker 6

It should be locked generally, and then they unlock it when they come and empty it. And I think they're emptying it on a daily basis, but it should generally have a lock on it.

[00:20:23.16] - Speaker 1

No, I mean locking so you can't put your ballot in.

[00:20:27.16] - Speaker 6

No, you can always put your ballot in.

[00:20:29.05] - Speaker 1

Okay, okay.

[00:20:30.06] - Speaker 2

Yeah, Madam Chair, it's only unlocked when the ballot box being stuffed.

[00:20:35.11] - Speaker 1

Aha, I understand. Okay, any other questions or comments here? So, um, Mayor, you're next.

[00:20:43.23] - Speaker 2

I don't have anything.

[00:20:45.21] - Speaker 3

Nope. Okay, we're good. Thank you.

[00:20:48.23] - Speaker 1

Looks like we have a goal here of having a fast meeting, so nobody interfere with this plan, please. Treasurer's report, please.

[00:20:55.28] - Speaker 3

Okay, thanks, Martha. Briefly, for the 10 months through April, revenues have come in at approximately \$2.4 million, which is pretty much in line with the same period last year. Expenditures are at approximately \$2.2 million, but that's about \$111,000 or 5% higher than last year. So two major issues account for much of the expenditure increase. One is salary and benefits are up in part because the police contract, at least as I understand it, hasn't been in place longer than this year compared to last. I think that's right. And then we have also seen, not surprisingly, a spike in maintenance costs. Related to the Red House, 4602 North Park, and the Village Center. I think so. The good news is we still have an estimated \$200,000 surplus through April. The not quite as good news is that the surplus is down significantly from the same period last year when it totaled about \$326,000 through April. So, and And I'll talk about this a little more when we get to the budget, but the surplus is likely to decline further going into next year. But on the capital side, we have spent approximately \$454,000 so far this year.

[00:22:17.04] - Speaker 3

That's a significant increase from prior years with costs largely related to Page Park, the Red House, and fountain improvements and water—waterproofing at the Village Center. So our fund balance now totals about \$4.6 million at the end of April. That's down about \$200,000 from the start of the year, largely reflecting our capital expenses offset by interest earnings and our surplus. So bottom line is we're in pretty good shape this year, and we'll talk a little bit more later in the agenda about the proposed budget for next year. Okay, thank you.

[00:22:56.14] - Speaker 1

Thank you. Committee reports, and I know a lot is happening on the development front, and you're going to be the star, I think, Francine, as chair of the Advisory Committee on Development. So I think you're next. Thanks.

[00:23:15.11] - Speaker 4

Hi everyone. This afternoon, the Village Council meeting with our lawyer Dave Brown Um, did agree to initiate a lawsuit, uh, with regard to the GEICO property in order to ensure, uh, that GEICO, its developer, EYA, uh, the County Planning Board, and the Montgomery County Council, uh, all ensure that the binding elements that were agreed to in 1998 be followed. We have been told by planning board staff and EYA that they don't believe the binding elements that were agreed to in 1998 and were subject to a local map amendment, uh, apply anymore, and they have reasons that they argue it no longer applies. Uh, as recently as November of 2025, the planning board gave direction to, um, GEICO to proceed in accordance with, uh, the action that was taken in connection with the local map amendment in 1998, and that requires that the binding elements be adhered to. Now, these binding elements, because they're not being adhered to, mean that EYA thinks it's able to build houses along Willard— build buildings along Willard, residential buildings along Willard that are higher than the plan called for in 1998. And they also think that they can short the community on the amount of green space that was required by the binding elements in 1998.

[00:25:15.22] - Speaker 4

Those are only a couple of examples of, um, what we think needs to be followed through on. So that's the news from me. We continue to meet with candidates for office and educate them about the situation here in the village with regard to Parcel 4 and Parcel 6 actually have more to say. We did a JOT form, um, I want to thank Jason Goldstein and, uh, Julian Mansfield for their work. This was the first JOT form that we've ever used in the village. It required coordination with the Citizens Coordinating Council of Friendship Heights, which helped answer our questions about how to use a JOT form. A JOT form is a form that's prepared in advance and then sent to residents so that by reading the form and adding their name to the form and hitting the submit button, their position on issues goes straight to elected officials. In this case, the position was opposition to new high-rise buildings in the village, and, um, by opening up the JOT form entering your name and other data and then hitting the submit button, uh, you could stand in opposition to new high-rises along Friendship Boulevard or North Park Avenue.

[00:26:47.09] - Speaker 4

Um, I suggest if there are people who are listening to this who have not, uh, opened up the announcement, uh, which said opposition to new high-rise buildings that you can still do it. It's still— if it's still in your inbox, you can open it up today and send out the JOT form. Folks, I know some have used it. I certainly have put it in, and everyone in your household can use it. So it's an individual vote that you get. We also have been working on a petition. Uh, that's getting started at the Carleton, the, uh, Elizabeth, and 4620. That specifically focuses on Parcel 6, which is, uh, between those three buildings. And we're hoping that people sign that petition because it's specifically about that parcel and what constructing a high-rise on that parcel would do to the ability to get natural light, sky views, and keep North Park lit and out of the shadows and not create an urban canyon. So that's something as well that folks can participate in if you live in those three buildings. One of the questions that comes up is when you write these things, How come you don't put everything that we're unhappy about with the sector plan and with GEICO in the same letter?

[00:28:29.26] - Speaker 4

And the answer to that is we want to target specific priorities. So one letter may be dealing with GEICO, or a lawsuit may be dealing with GEICO, and then a petition may be dealing with Parcel 6. We want our elected officials and our appointed officials, uh, to look at these issues separately and not just see everything listed necessarily in one letter, which the village has done. We've done comprehensive letters, but when it comes to gaining resident support, we also want to focus on the individual concerns that particular residents have depending upon where they live in the village. And so that's where we are, and I think that that's a summary of it. Thank you.

[00:29:21.21] - Speaker 1

Thank you, Francine, for the tremendous effort you've put forth. And this is not an issue that's going to go away quickly. It's a marathon. It's not a sprint. And thank you for the legal work and the advocacy. And we're all— you know, it's all of our jobs to help make people aware and to the extent you believe it of what's mentioned in the petition to try to get people to sign it. And I know I live in the Carleton. I will be sending it out on our, the equivalent of our listserv. And I'll also be having times I'll be in the lobby and say, I'm gonna be there from such and such times to answer any questions or to have it available for people to sign. So the more we let people know, the more we can be a cohesive community. On this topic. But again, much thanks to everyone who's worked on development. I'm looking for what's next. Finance Committee.

[00:30:24.26] - Speaker 3

Okay, thanks, Martha. Real briefly, um, when the Finance Committee met, uh, back in March, we reviewed a draft of the operating budget. The committee voted to recommend the operating budget for review by the council. That is on the agenda today, although it's not entirely clear we'll move forward with it. In addition to that, we reviewed the capital budget. However, it was decided that the capital budget, we would hold off on recommending that to council until we had an opportunity to review it further. Both of these issues are likely to come up again at a meeting later this later this month or early next. And then the other thing that we did, uh, is, uh, we approved, uh, a vote to keep the property tax, uh, the same. That was referred to council and it was approved by council at the last meeting. So that's an update on the Finance Committee meeting last month. Thank you.

[00:31:25.19] - Speaker 1

Parks and Grounds, um, I think our project manager shared a lot of what we decided and talked about at our last meeting. We spent a lot of time talking about a fence, and we spent— what else did we talk about? Oh, permits, when we're going to get things done. You've already heard all this, so I don't want to repeat myself. Policies and Procedures Committee.

[00:32:01.20] - Speaker 3

Thank you.

[00:32:02.18] - Speaker 5

Um, well, the committee met on May 8th, just this past Friday, and as we're reviewing the Village's parking policy and decided to conduct a survey to determine residents' preferences, the survey will be posted in the June newsletter, on the website, and other Village communications. Channels beginning on June 1st, and it will run through the entire month of June. Um, we discussed parking enforcement, and the committee is exploring whether to change parking enforcement contractors.

[00:32:42.25] - Speaker 3

More on that as, as it develops.

[00:32:47.05] - Speaker 5

The committee is in the process of reviewing the personnel policy and Mr. Mansfield presented a draft policy that he and Mr. Goldstein prepared. The committee will make comments on the draft and take action at its next meeting.

[00:33:02.08] - Speaker 2

Thank you.

[00:33:03.26] - Speaker 1

Thank you. I think now we move to old business. Now, I think I mentioned, and the project manager did, the first item we will not There is no need to vote on the fence. We are not putting a fence in Page Park, so we will not be taking up the first agenda item. So, uh, new business. The first item is the discussion vote on the proposed fiscal year 2027 operating budget. I'm suggesting breaking this, this up. Our Treasurer has a presentation to help us learn more about the budget, and I was unable to go through all the materials, so I'm proposing that we, we discuss today but vote at the next meeting. So I'm moving to postpone the adoption of the fiscal year 2027 operating budget until the next meeting, which is in June. Thank you, John. All in favor? Oh, I'm sorry, discussing about postponing? Yes. Okay, okay, discussion.

[00:34:28.20] - Speaker 3

Thank you. Very quick question: if we're going to postpone the vote, we— would you be more comfortable postponing the discussion?

[00:34:35.26] - Speaker 2

Or would you want to do it now?

[00:34:37.04] - Speaker 3

I'm asking. Yeah, I don't think it hurts to, uh, for me to give a brief update of where things stand, and then we can take it from there.

[00:34:45.09] - Speaker 5

Okay.

[00:34:46.10] - Speaker 1

Um, to add on to that, um, I had asked, um, our treasurer to proceed with the presentations because it helps me learn, you know, and it helps me figure out what questions I have. So, um, are we ready to vote on the postponement? Opponent of the, uh, vote on the operating budget. All in favor say aye. Aye. Thank you. That sounds unanimous. So we have our last, um, item for

our public meeting. I'm sorry, I'm sorry, we are talking now about our, our, our treasurer is going to educate us on the proposed operating budget for fiscal year 2027. I apologize, I'm a little—

[00:35:33.01] - Speaker 3

I promise to keep it brief.

[00:35:34.18] - Speaker 1

Okay, please, please don't feel the need to. I mean, we need to learn, it's important.

[00:35:39.07] - Speaker 2

Yeah.

[00:35:41.27] - Speaker 3

Um, okay, uh, so I'll just give a brief overview of where things stand. Um, the recommended operating budget, uh, or estimated expenditures I should say, for FY27 is approximately \$2,964,000 or just shy of \$3 million. That's up approximately \$117,000 or 4% from this year's current estimate. So expenditures are up and the 4% increase basically means, and I'm talking about the budget now, that expenditures for FY '27 are 1% are up 4% or 1% over the rate of inflation, which averaged 3% for the DMV, Washington, Arlington, Alexandria, including Montgomery County through March. So we are up a little more. The proposed budget is up a little more than the rate of inflation. And the major reason for that is that we are still playing catch-up on salaries in addition to the Finance Committee's proposed 3% increase in salaries due to inflation. The proposed budget includes a 1% pay pool, uh, or \$6,000 to be distributed by the village manager, and an additional \$16,700 to be distributed to employees whose salaries are considered below comparable positions in other jurisdictions. So And none of this includes police salaries, which are set under contract. So in developing these salary estimates, I want to thank members of Policies and Procedures Committee, including Al, Martha, and Francine— or Vic, Martha, and Francine— for coordinating with Finance on pay pool and comparable salary adjustments.

[00:37:36.06] - Speaker 3

I think that coordination helps us better understand the issues and reach consensus. So, but salaries alone, I just want to point out, constitute about 37% of our total budget. Most other expenditure categories in the proposed budget are reasonably in line with expectations and in total are expected to come in below the rate of inflation. With an estimated increase of about

1.8% in other items of expenditures, including— excluding salaries. So on the revenue side, however, we're facing an approximate 5% decline due mainly to the \$242,000 estimated drop in income tax revenues in fiscal year '27 because of the government shutdown and layoffs. The good news here is that despite the estimated decline in revenues next year and a 4% increase in expenditures, we still have an estimated surplus in the proposed budget for next year of about \$5,000. The not so good news maybe is that the proposed budget suggests we need to pay close attention to managing our expenditures to avoid potential tax increases if possible going forward. So let's see. So I think essentially we're facing what I would— what I think of as a sort of budgetary version of stagflation in which revenues are declining and expenditures are rising.

[00:39:17.20] - Speaker 3

And hopefully the economy recovers, revenues rise, and we can move on. But there's no guarantee. So we, given all the uncertainty around our geopolitics, so I think we want to— we need to keep a close eye on our budget and manage expenditures as best we can. And at this point, I'll turn it over to Martha for comments.

[00:39:41.07] - Speaker 1

I have a question about what you just said. You said the police were not included. Did you mean not included in the increase? They're included in the operating budget.

[00:39:52.17] - Speaker 3

Oh, absolutely. Not included in the salary increase. Okay, okay.

[00:39:57.29] - Speaker 1

Um, I do have a question for the village manager. Is, is this proposed budget available to residents to review? Can we post it?

[00:40:10.13] - Speaker 6

Yeah, it can be posted. It has not been because it's still being reviewed by the council, but it can be posted.

[00:40:17.26] - Speaker 1

Are you saying, are you saying we would normally post it only after it's approved?

[00:40:22.16] - Speaker 6

Once it's been approved through the process, typically yes, but you know, prior to the public hearing and all that. But this time we had a public hearing on the tax rate only. Okay, so we would— yeah, we would publicize it at some point. So that's, that's a sort of a process question.

[00:40:39.16] - Speaker 1

Um, I, um, I will— I'd like to confer with, um, our treasurer. I'm in favor of letting people see the proposed budget before we vote and give us comments or show up at the next meeting? Would that be amenable to you?

[00:40:56.28] - Speaker 3

I think that I have a problem with that given the short amount of time that remains for us to get the budget approved this year. I think if we wanted to consider something along those lines in succeeding years, we could do that.

[00:41:12.26] - Speaker 1

Okay.

[00:41:13.07] - Speaker 3

But I think we should have, if we do decide to do that. I think we should have a very well-defined process.

[00:41:18.15] - Speaker 1

Okay.

[00:41:19.05] - Speaker 3

And making sure that we have enough time not only to get input but to process it and make sure that all— it's all— and that can take some time because, I mean, there's dozens of expenditures.

[00:41:30.18] - Speaker 1

I know, I know, I know. Okay, fair enough. I'll defer on that. But if I could also ask that there be copies available at the table when people come in at the next meeting. Councilmember Muller.

[00:41:43.14] - Speaker 2

Traditionally, traditionally, we have presented a draft budget to the population in the newsletter. I've sort of lost track of what we did or didn't do this year. Manager Mansfield, didn't, didn't we usually send out a draft budget? I know we used to have 2 public hearings, not 1.

[00:42:12.17] - Speaker 6

Yeah, we used to, we used to combine the hearing for the budget and the tax rate, and there would be a public presentation of the budget prior to that.

[00:42:21.13] - Speaker 2

So we haven't had a—

[00:42:23.05] - Speaker 6

but we're not, we're not having a public hearing on the budget itself. We just had a hearing on the tax rate, and the budget was still being developed, so there was not a public posting of the draft budget at that point. But it It certainly can be.

[00:42:37.02] - Speaker 2

I would hope that beginning next year we go back to a system that we have the draft budget before the public before we vote on it. It's a guideline in any case. We try to hold to it, but obviously we say it every year, the budget is not sacrosanct. The snow removal is the most obvious one that we can have a line item, It's only an educated guess, but I'm concerned somehow. I thought we'd had something, mainly because we've all seen some aspects of it, but the public should traditionally see it before we vote on it. Can't we—

[00:43:22.26] - Speaker 6

Well, it has been made available. It's been made available at the Finance Committee meetings whenever we've been talking about the draft, but posting— yeah, posting widely has not happened yet, no.

[00:43:33.05] - Speaker 2

The Finance Committee meetings are not intended to be a substitute for a full public disclosure to all the public, because the Finance Committee meetings are relatively small. Everyone's invited, and all 3 people who show up, I'm sure, are happy to see what is being done. But I

agree with the chair that I think at some point going forward, and if we're going to vote, we are going to vote on a guideline budget. There's no reason that that can't be ready and available the week before.

[00:44:15.26] - Speaker 1

Thank you. I'll just say John. That's the word that's popping out of my mouth. Treasurer Connelly.

[00:44:24.25] - Speaker 3

I just want to offer a cautionary note that the budget is highly technical and complicated, and when you make it available before it's approved by council, you're opening it up to a lot of issues that could drag on and be difficult to reconcile. So I think we need to be a little bit careful. The idea that budgets are available to the public before they're approved is not something that I have much experience with. They usually in government— in governmental agencies, you know, the finance committee puts forward a budget, it's approved, and then it's made public. It's not— so I'm a little— I would be a little bit careful if we're going to go down that road that that we be very conscious of the fact that we could be opening up a bit of a can of worms and we need to have a very clear process in place on how we would manage it. Thank you.

[00:45:29.04] - Speaker 1

[Speaker] So if I may ask you a question, if we historically put it in the newsletter, which would be what, like 2 weeks before our meeting roughly, would you be opposed to that for the reasons you just mentioned or Because it's not an actively soliciting people's opinions, it's just here is what we will be considering at the next meeting. Can you allow him to answer and then—

[00:45:57.10] - Speaker 5

yeah.

[00:45:57.14] - Speaker 3

[Speaker:ED] If we were to go down that road, I would suggest very strongly that we have a summary form of the budget presented, not the detail that we're currently looking at, you know, so. By major category.

[00:46:13.15] - Speaker 1

Okay.

[00:46:14.01] - Speaker 3

We could do something like that, yeah.

[00:46:15.10] - Speaker 1

Would you feel comfortable with it or are you reluctantly saying—

[00:46:18.10] - Speaker 3

I think it would— I would feel comfortable with it if we had a process— if we talked about the process in place for how we respond to any comments that we get from it. In other words, we— you know, a little bit concerned that it could open up a kind of can of worms that would be difficult to manage if we haven't thought it through in advance.

[00:46:42.06] - Speaker 1

Okay, um, Mayor Schafer?

[00:46:43.22] - Speaker 3

Well, I don't, I don't believe we've ever in the newsletter published a draft budget.

[00:46:48.28] - Speaker 6

That's exactly what I was going to say. Yeah, we don't, we don't put it in the newsletter. We put a reference to it in the newsletter. We could say it's on our website. We might even put a link to it in the newsletter, but it would not be published in the newsletter.

[00:47:03.04] - Speaker 2

Madam Chair? Excuse me, but I'm pretty certain that we had either in the newsletter or in the annual report at some point— the annual report, yes, but the public got the chance to see the draft, the draft of the budget And I don't know what can of worms the treasurer is concerned about. There were occasionally questions then at the follow-up public meetings of, well, what is line item J referring to? It went up. Those were rare and those were answered by the treasurer or the chair of the committee. There wasn't any— I can simply say what's happened or not happened before. I don't know what types of problems there could be, but it's transparency and the ultimate answer always was, well, these are guidelines to the best of the knowledge of the

council and the manager. And we're not saying for sure that it's going to be within these limits. But they usually were, I mean, within 95% accuracy.

[00:48:28.25] - Speaker 1

I'm inclined to defer to the Treasurer, but did you have something?

[00:48:32.28] - Speaker 3

Well, I—

[00:48:33.17] - Speaker 1

Mayor Schafer?

[00:48:34.11] - Speaker 3

I was thinking maybe we release it with the agenda and put it up on the website unless there's an objection to doing it that way. I think the only point I'm making is that we should— discuss it further and have a clear process in place. Do we really want to put all the detail of the budget as we typically review it on the website, or do we want to have a summary-level version that's more— a little easier for people to get their heads around? You know, dozens and dozens of revenue and expenditure categories is a little bit much, I feel, to put out there in public. Before the council has reviewed it. That's my only point.

[00:49:22.24] - Speaker 1

Okay, so I think we can defer to you and your committee. Does that make sense to everybody? Okay. And then maybe figure out what we want to do other years. And when you say there's a lot of detail, that's why I proposed delaying because I could not process it in enough time for this meeting. So I am sympathetic to that. We have, um, I think two final items. One relates to, um, the lights that will be in the fountain area in the front. And could I ask the Village Manager to explain, um, sort of the option of what we're voting— what, what we can vote for and what the costs are?

[00:50:06.13] - Speaker 6

Yes, because I did get some additional information just this afternoon regarding which I reported to the council some specs, sort of information about the proposed lighting, and the Parks and Grounds Committee discussed this at their meeting last week and wanted the full council to sort

of weigh in on this. So the— just brief background— the fountain repair project included replacement of lights, but it did not specify color lights or white lights. So the RFP was issued and the bids came in, and then after the bid was awarded we wanted to go back to them and ask them about the option of adding color lights to restore the fountain to what it had been many years ago with, with color lights in the pool itself. And so that led to basically a change order from the contractor to provide the option for color lights. And one question which Councilmember Klein asked today, which we got an answer for to confirm, is that you can have an option of all white lights or all color lights. That was not clear previously. So this, this lighting system would allow you to go back and forth, and the lights would be completely underwater.

[00:51:15.23] - Speaker 6

They're on the base of the fountain and covered, so they're not protruding, they're not sort of glaring or any kind of spotlights. They're basically sort of accent lights within the fountain itself. So the, the change order is for \$3,500. which includes a remote control, which would allow us to go back and forth between the two different, either white or color. Um, and it was technically 10— more than 10% of the total cost of the contract. So under the acquisitions policy, I was required to notify the council before approving this, and that's what led to this discussion.

[00:51:56.29] - Speaker 4

I have a question.

[00:51:59.02] - Speaker 1

Um, can I make the motion to do this and then we'll do it in the right order? So, um, I move to approve the expenditure of \$3,500 for a, um, for lighting of the fountain with white and colored options and a remote control.

[00:52:21.23] - Speaker 2

Do I second.

[00:52:23.28] - Speaker 1

Okay, um, Councilmember Muller seconds. And, uh, is that clear, um, Mr. Mansfield, for purposes of acting on it? Okay, so we have a motion and a second, so that means we discuss and ask questions.

[00:52:40.02] - Speaker 4

Um, Councilmember Klein, what would be the cost if it was just the white lights?

[00:52:49.18] - Speaker 6

The, the base cost of the contract, which was \$27,000 plus. So the white lights, the white lights was included in the base cost of the contract. To do the color option is an additional \$3,500. It's basically a change order. So the total now would be, you know, \$27,000 plus \$3,500.

[00:53:10.03] - Speaker 4

Thank you.

[00:53:14.04] - Speaker 1

Other questions or comments? Uh, to be honest, I was one of the people that preferred the white, but now if we have an option that makes everybody happy, I'm certainly willing to go forward with that. Are we ready for a vote on this? So, um, all in favor of approving the acquisition of a white and colored light and remote control For the— what do we call it?

[00:53:44.27] - Speaker 2

Fountain.

[00:53:45.17] - Speaker 1

Fountain, that's right. Fountain for \$3,500. Say aye or raise your hand.

[00:53:49.19] - Speaker 5

Aye.

[00:53:50.15] - Speaker 1

I can't— is Francine? No.

[00:53:55.15] - Speaker 2

Okay.

[00:53:56.13] - Speaker 1

I'll say yes. Or are you saying no?

[00:54:01.28] - Speaker 4

Do I want to say no?

[00:54:04.01] - Speaker 1

You can vote no. Okay. Okay, all those who abstain?

[00:54:08.08] - Speaker 4

I'm abstaining.

[00:54:10.07] - Speaker 1

Okay, and one abstention.

[00:54:11.23] - Speaker 5

Abstinence is good.

[00:54:13.23] - Speaker 1

So, uh, the motion passes.

[00:54:15.28] - Speaker 3

Yeah, I, I hope we're getting a lot more than one remote because I've had things I lose the remote and it's—

[00:54:23.02] - Speaker 1

yeah, right.

[00:54:24.04] - Speaker 2

Either in black or in white, right?

[00:54:27.05] - Speaker 1

I think, uh, we need a motion to go into a closed meeting and, um I'm— I need to read this aloud and move that the council go into a closed meeting in accordance with Section 3-305(b) of the Open Meetings Act. Is that enough?

[00:54:50.26] - Speaker 6

For the purpose of 3-305(b)(1), to discuss personnel issues.

[00:54:56.27] - Speaker 1

To discuss personnel issues. Is there a second on that? Okay, there's a second. I don't think we need to discuss. So can we just vote to go into the closed session? I think— I'm assuming you're a yes, Vic, because you don't have your hand. Yes, we're going into closed session. Um, thank you very much for everybody who was online and came to our meeting. Um, it really helps to have the public interested in what we're doing. Thank you.