



Richmond City Council

900 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23219
www.rva.gov/office-city-clerk

Budget Work Session Minutes

Wednesday, April 15, 2026

1:00 PM

Council Chamber, 2nd Floor - City Hall

Council Members Present

The Honorable Cynthia Newbille – President
The Honorable Katherine Jordan – Vice President
The Honorable Sarah Abubaker
The Honorable Andrew Breton (early exit)
The Honorable Kenya Gibson (early exit)
The Honorable Nicole Jones (early exit)
The Honorable Stephanie Lynch (late arrival)
The Honorable Ellen Robertson
The Honorable Reva Trammell

Others in Attendance

Laura Drewry, City Attorney
Kiley Kesecker, Deputy City Clerk
Candice Reid, City Clerk
Tabrica Rentz, Deputy City Attorney
RJ Warren, Council Chief of Staff

Call to Order

President Cynthia Newbille called the meeting to order at 1:07 p.m. and presided.

Chamber Emergency Evacuation Plan Announcement

At the President's request, the deputy city clerk provided information on the appropriate way to evacuate the Council Chamber in an emergency.

RJ Warren, Council Chief of Staff, provided an overview of the process for the work session and advised that no final decisions would be made during the meeting, as additional time was being afforded to members for review and discussion of pending amendments.

He stated that the deadline for submission of budget amendments had been extended to Thursday, April 16, 2026, at 5:00 p.m., and that finalized budget documents would be posted online by Friday, April 17, 2026, in advance of decisions scheduled for Monday, April 20, 2026.

Mr. Warren also reported that certain amendments had been consolidated in advance of the session in the interest of efficiency, and that staff had prepared a set of highlighted items for Council's attention.

Council Amendment Considerations

[CD.2026.115](#) FY 2027 Proposed City Council Amendments

A copy of the material provided has been filed.

Richmond Public Schools and Social Services Funding

Council reviewed a proposed amendment, submitted in both text and general fund form, providing \$175,000 for an independent third-party audit of Richmond Public Schools. The Chief of Staff explained that the audit would be managed by the City Auditor rather than by Richmond Public Schools, and that the purpose of the amendment is to increase transparency and to address discrepancies identified in the level of budget detail provided by the school division.

Councilor Stephanie Lynch arrived at 1:19 p.m. and was seated.

Council also discussed funding for the Richmond Virtual Academy. The Chief of Staff advised that the cost estimate had been revised from \$1.6 million to \$3.2 million following consultation with Richmond Public Schools. It was further clarified that, absent full funding of the entire Richmond Public Schools budget, funding for the Virtual Academy specifically cannot be guaranteed.

Members expressed concern regarding transparency and the practical consequences of partial funding, and requested documentation supporting the revised cost estimate.

Council reviewed a request for five new full-time positions within the Department of Social Services at an estimated cost of approximately \$69,000 following state reimbursement. Council was advised that the amendment may not require significant city funding given the high rate of state reimbursement associated with the positions.

Capital Improvement Program and Infrastructure

The Chief of Staff advised that Council staff is exploring the use of the GAP Grant Program, established in the fall of 2024 and scheduled to expire at the end of 2025, as a funding source for certain amendments.

Council discussed several traffic and school safety projects, including traffic studies, school safety improvements, and sidewalk enhancements. Staff noted that funding for several of the projects is already available or is being pursued through grants. Staff cited \$500,000 identified for citywide school safety improvements as an example and explained that existing grant funds may be applied to reduce City expenditure. Staff further advised that \$100,000 has been set aside for Council-directed speed table installations, at an approximate cost of \$10,000 per speed table.

Members requested additional details regarding school bus usage for after-school programming and questioned the rationale supporting certain proposed reductions.

Participatory Budgeting

Council discussed improved alignment of the participatory budgeting process with the City's budget cycle. Staff reported that approximately ten percent of requests arising from the participatory process exceed current spending levels, and that the balance of requests is reprioritized within existing departmental budgets. Staff advised that planned transparency improvements include public dashboards and periodic presentations to Council. Members cited \$600,000 expended on tree planting as an example of an outcome driven directly by citizen input.

City Services and Personnel

Council reviewed a proposed amendment to strike new language permitting up to one year of severance for senior executives, which would restore the previous policy. Members requested legal clarification regarding the impact of the proposed change on existing contracts.

Council discussed a customer service position within the Office of the Assessor that was eliminated during the COVID-19 period and has not been restored. The council expressed support for reinstatement of the position.

Members raised concerns regarding a \$241,000 reduction associated with the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office.

City Administration clarified that the change reflects a technical adjustment and does not constitute an actual reduction in funding or the elimination of positions. It was also reported that meetings were scheduled for further clarification.

Housing and Community Development

Council reviewed an amendment intended to ensure that agreed funding levels for the Affordable Housing Trust Fund are maintained, and staff provided clarification regarding the applicable bond funding mechanisms.

Council discussed funding requests associated with revitalization of the Central Business District, including digital infrastructure, hotel development, and demolition of the Coliseum. Certain members suggested reconsideration of demolition in favor of community-oriented uses of the site.

Utilities and Energy Efficiency

Council discussed redirecting surplus Gas Utility Fund revenue derived from new business toward maintenance and energy efficiency projects. Staff presented a proposal to fund an energy efficiency coordinator position from utility savings.

Audits and Transparency

Riad Ali, City Auditor, reported on audits currently underway, including audits of revenue refunds, payment processes, and Fire Department payroll.

Council emphasized the need for supporting documentation and detailed breakdowns, particularly with respect to Richmond Public Schools and participatory budgeting allocations and reiterated the intent to establish public dashboards to track project progress and expenditures.

Councilor Nicole Jones left the meeting at 3:06 p.m.

Councilor Andrew Breton left the meeting at 3:10 p.m.

Councilor Kenya Gibson left the meeting at 3:12 p.m.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:13 p.m.

CITY CLERK