900 East Broad Street
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Richmond City Council

Budget Work Session Minutes

Wednesday, March 25, 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 (late arrival)
The Honorable Andrew Breton
The Honorable Kenya Gibson (late arrival)
The Honorable Nicole Jones
The Honorable Reva Trammell

Members Absent

The Honorable Stephanie Lynch
The Honorable Ellen Robertson

Others in Attendance

Laura Drewry, City Attorney
Kiley Kesecker, Deputy City Clerk
Nahdiyah Muhammad, Assistant 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 1:06 p.m., and presided.

Chamber Emergency Evacuation Plan Announcement

Upon the President's request, Assistant City Clerk Nahdiyah Muhammad provided information on the appropriate way to evacuate the Council Chamber in an emergency.

Councilor Kenya Gibson arrived at 1:08 p.m., and was seated.

RJ Warren, Council Chief of Staff, provided Council with an overview of the standard operating procedures ahead of city administration’s presentation on the city’s operating budget.

Overview of City Operations Budget

Alfred Wiggins, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer (DCAO) of Operations, provided Council with an introduction regarding his professional background and an overview of city operations and the proposed FY27 budget. DCAO Wiggins stated the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Community Facilities has been transitioned into the operations portfolio and the proposed FY27 budget reflects a continued focus on operational efficiency, strategic investment, and performance outcomes.

CD.2026.095 Budget Work Sessions Documents - Operations

A copy of the presentation provided has been filed.

Councilor Sarah Abubaker arrived at 1:14 p.m., and was seated.

Councilor Nicole Jones inquired about and requested the following:
• Details on how the 5% increase in out of school time (OST) slots will be implemented
• NextUp expansion alignments with other partner funded OST programs
• Whether the increase will expand existing programs or create new ones
• A side-by-side comparison of current versus proposed OST offerings and capacity

DCAO Wiggins stated that coordination with NextUp and other partner organizations remains a priority. He explained that additional slots had not yet been determined, and the primary objective is to sustain existing programs.

Councilor Sarah Abubaker inquired about and requested the following:
• Parks and Recreation Capital Improvement Projects (CIP) budget decrease and whether projects will be deferred
• Fluctuations in the Department of Public Utilities (DPU) special fund

• Portions of fleet operations being shifted from DPU to the Department of General Services (DGS)
• Clarification on staffing trends across the portfolio
• Clarification on staffing changes within Neighborhood and Community Services
• Clarification on the $1.1 million increase in personnel costs in the DCAO's office from FY26 to FY27

DCAO Wiggins stated CIP projects across the enterprise are currently undergoing reprioritization, and reductions in individual capital programs should not be interpreted as a decrease in overall program capacity. He further noted that many projects are being strategically consolidated to maximize resources. DCAO Wiggins also stated DPU serves as a strong partner to Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities, enabling the expansion of green space initiatives while sharing associated costs.

Lawson Wijesooriya, Chief of Staff to the Mayor, explained that all departments were directed to identify potential 2% reductions to help accommodate rising costs, fulfill existing commitments, and support priority initiatives. She stated that these reductions were primarily achieved through operational adjustments rather than workforce reductions.

Odie Donald, II, Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), stated the general fund reflects minimal personnel growth, with a net increase of only three positions, indicating a focus on realignment rather than expansion. He emphasized that the administration is prioritizing efficiency, avoiding duplication, and ensuring appropriate compensation, in alignment with prior Council guidance.

Councilor Reva Trammell inquired about and requested the following:
• Strategies to recruit and retain police officers
• City's staffing level compared to neighboring jurisdictions
• Retired officers being re-engaged to support departmental operations
• Aging sanitation equipment
• Equitable waste collection across all neighborhoods

Rick Edwards, Chief of Police, stated the Richmond Police Department is authorized for 750 sworn positions but is currently funded for 650, with 604 sworn personnel on staff. Chief Edwards stated a comprehensive, line-by-line review of all positions were conducted to determine which roles are filled, civilianized, or consolidated. As a result, several functions have been transitioned to civilian personnel.

DCAO Wiggins stated issues with leaking garbage trucks are a common challenge in older equipment, and explained that DGS has implemented mitigation strategies. He also noted that improper disposal of materials can contribute to the problem, particularly when items unsuitable for standard municipal solid waste collection are placed in trash receptacles.

Vice President Katherine Jordan inquired about and requested the following:
• Clarification on staffing levels within the Fire Department and DPU, and an explanation of vacancy levels
• Continued high levels of overtime and whether overtime is expected to remain necessary in the upcoming fiscal year
• An assessment of current recruitment efforts and whether they are sufficient to meet operational needs

DCAO Wiggins stated that recruitment remains competitive, as other jurisdictions actively seek to attract qualified personnel, resulting in some loss of staff through transfers and separations. Mr. Wiggins explained that a certain level of overtime within the Fire Department is required under the Fair Labor Standards Act, as Fire personnel operate under different hour thresholds than other employees, and exceeding those thresholds triggers mandatory overtime. He stated that a more detailed and current breakdown of staffing levels would be provided.

Councilor Andrew Breton inquired about and requested the following:
• Budget interpretation with the establishment of the Department of Transportation (DOT)
• Designated budget allocation for lighter, quicker, cheaper infrastructure improvements
• Criteria for determining whether transportation projects are funded through the operating budget versus CIP bonds or grant funding
• Clarification on Complete Streets funding structure and relationship to Central Virginia Transportation Authority (CVTA) funding

DCAO Wiggins stated that the establishment of the Department of Transportation (DOT) was a strategic decision implemented on an accelerated timeline. He further stated that operating budget expenditures are generally associated with day-to-day activities, capital funding supports long term investments that often require sustained financing, and grant funding is typically restricted to the specific scope and requirements of individual projects.

Andy Boenau, Director of Transportation for the Department of Public Works, stated that the city has created a dedicated community engagement division within the transportation team to improve coordination between outreach staff, planners, and engineers. He also described the city's use of low cost, high impact "lighter, quicker, cheaper" projects that allow flexibility in addressing transportation and safety needs efficiently.

Bobby Vincent, Director of Public Works, stated the city has $1.2 billion dedicated to public right-of-way improvements through general funds, General Obligation bonds, and special funds. He explained that operating and special funds provide flexibility for projects such as paving, sidewalks, and Complete Streets improvements, while bond-funded projects are typically site specific. Mr. Vincent noted the city invests $18 to $21 million annually in paving, $6.5 million in sidewalks, and $20 million in Complete Streets initiatives. He also stated that detailed project information may not always appear in budget line items but can be provided through departmental tracking systems.

Councilor Kenya Gibson inquired about and requested the following:
• Clarification on the $4 million Fire Department budget overage reported in the FY 2025 Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR)
• A comprehensive presentation on DPU staffing and service capacity
• Additional detail regarding the $47 million increase in utility expenses
• Clarification of staffing levels for customer care specialists, including the reduction from 41 positions in the FY 2026 budget to 20 positions in the proposed FY 2027 budget
• Clarification regarding the $1.2 million increase in contractual agreement costs
• Detailed breakdown of how license plate reader funding is reflected within the budget

DCAO Wiggins stated that city administration will conduct a thorough investigation into the reported $4 million Fire Department overage. He noted that the reduction of 21 FTEs does not represent a true decrease in service capacity, and the work is now delivered through a contractual agreement. Mr. Wiggins explained that the majority of the $47 million increase is attributable to rising costs for gas and other utilities.

Scott Morris, Director of Public Utilities, stated twenty customer service agents are currently being trained on a new customer service system, which is expected to go live at the end of May.

Chief Edwards stated the speed camera program has generated $4,145,330 in revenue, with expenditures totaling $1,586,322, resulting in a net surplus of approximately $2,559,000. He noted that those funds support program operations, and the remaining funds are allocated to the Vision Zero initiative.

President Cynthia Newbille inquired about and requested the following:
• Information on the current and projected CVTA funding available to support DOT priorities
• Information on the potential impact of a $20 million shortfall in state funding

Director Vincent stated that the city projects receive approximately $18 million annually from the CVTA. He explained that the funding supports initiatives such as street cleaning, sidewalk maintenance, urban forestry and tree planting, intersection safety improvements, enhanced crosswalk visibility along the city's high injury network, signal modification projects, and speed table installations.

Mr. Boenau stated that the city's priorities remain Vision Zero and Complete Streets initiatives. He explained that improving roadway conditions contributes to safer streets and that the city continues to pursue opportunities to calm traffic and expand safe transportation options for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users.

DCAO Wiggins stated that the state funding shortfall will not impact the city's ability to provide safe drinking water or water treatment services.

Councilor Nicole Jones inquired about and requested the following:
• Effectiveness of "lighter, quicker, cheaper" projects on the High Injury Network
• Sidewalk infrastructure for future Affordable Housing Trust Fund developments in areas without existing sidewalks

DCAO Wiggins stated that DOT was created to provide a dedicated team focused on measurable outcomes and the allocation of funding for projects, and the city expects to implement performance measures and service level agreements within the next year. He explained that such efforts are primarily driven by transportation studies and development projects, rather than population growth alone, and are also influenced by traffic calming measures.

Councilor Reva Trammell inquired about and requested the following:
• Cost of living adjustments (COLA) for city retirees
• Property purchased for the previously proposed casino project and future development opportunities

DCAO Wiggins stated that DCAO Ebert is actively working on the Altria site and related economic development initiatives. He acknowledged Council's concerns regarding a potential COLA, but the city must also consider its ability to financially sustain future increases.

Councilor Sarah Abubaker inquired about and requested the following:
• The city's plan for growth within public safety departments
• Clarification regarding the city considering staffing models that tie development growth and building permits to firefighter staffing levels
• Mutual aid for surrounding jurisdictions

CAO Donald stated that the city is strengthening automatic aid and mutual aid agreements with neighboring localities to support public safety operations. He noted that city administration is improving the permitting process to better collect data, and is focused on stabilizing the Fire Department, reducing overtime costs, and increasing recruitment efforts.

Councilor Andrew Breton inquired about information regarding which investments are being made to improve the accuracy of the city's billing system and where they can be identified within the budget or supporting documentation.

DCAO Wiggins stated that the city is making significant upgrades to automated meter reading technology and replacement of meter components to improve calibration and billing accuracy, as well as supporting software systems used to manage infrastructure.

Councilor Kenya Gibson inquired about and requested the following:
- Clarification regarding the positions eliminated and added within the proposed budget
- Additional information regarding the proposed FOIA manager position

Ross Catrow, Director of the Office of Strategic Communications and Civic Engagement, stated that no positions were eliminated, only reclassified, and that the changes are budget neutral through the reallocation of operating funds to personnel. He further stated that one position supports the FOIA manager’s duties and another supports the Social Media Manager, and clarified that the FOIA position is unrelated to the FOIA library initiative.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:06 p.m.

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CITY CLERK